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A
DOUBLE MARRIAGE

By
LUCAS CLEEVE



COLONIAL EDITION
(For Circulation in the British Colonies and India only)

LONDON
T. FISHER UNWIN
1 ADELPHI TERRACE
MCMVI

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A DOUBLE MARRIAGE

PART I

CHAPTER I

"DEAREST.—When you read this letter, I shall have gone—have disappeared from your life, and you and your mother, every one, will have the right to say I have behaved like a blackguard. I know that I have; I know that the world will have a right to blame me; and I know that you will never be able to forgive me. Only I ask you to try and forget me. I told you when I married that I was peculiar, unfit for married life, unfit to link my life with any girl's. I have tried—ah, you don't know, Lucille, how I have tried—to be a good husband, to learn to take an interest in small things, in the small, pretty little domesticities, which you make so graceful. I shall miss you, I know how I shall miss you, your sweet face, your pretty ways, but I feel that presently you will be happier, meet with some one who is far more worthy of you than I am. Something calls me always away to further corners of the earth. I am restless, imbued, as it were, with the detective spirit—the detective spirit which impels me to discover the secrets of Nature, to unravel the

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mysteries of phenomena, and I am not happy except alone. Luxury, comfort, even affection, irritate me, and you know how constantly I lose my temper. I can no longer control myself. You have told me of late that I had something on my mind—that I was unhappy, disturbed. You were right. For weeks I have tried to get over the mood which obsesses me, to drive my desires for wandering from me, to try and fall into your ways; but I have failed. The craving for solitude has taken possession of me, and every word you speak, every time the doorbell rings, or a visitor comes in, it drives me mad. I am afraid of myself. Your mother spoke to me last night. Every word she said was true. She said that you were not happy, and I know that you are not—that I have failed miserably. I fear I was rude to her. Ask her to forgive me. There is no one in the world that I respect more than your mother. I have no fault to find with you, you are adorable; but I have failed as a husband—failed miserably. I have no excuse to offer for having asked you to marry me—no excuse for going away. I am wondering whether some day you will understand. You have always said that I was not like other men. Perhaps I am mad—I don't know. One thing I beg of you, and that is, if ever you meet a man more worthy of you, and whom you can love, to put me out of your mind. If you wish to divorce me, I will make no defence; if you wish me to free you by other means, a letter will reach me care of my solicitors, and I will disappear completely from your path. After all, what is one life amongst so many? I should at least feel that I had a little atoned for this unpardonable act of leaving you. I

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have made over nearly all my fortune to you. See Greene & Hastings, and make what arrangements you like. The house in town is yours, and the little place. I do not want you to grieve. On the contrary, I hope that now for the first time you will be happy. Your tears have almost broken my heart, principally, I believe, because I have not known the right way to wipe them away—to make you smile. Forgive me, dear, if you can, or if you cannot forgive, then forget me. Let it be as if it had never been.

“CLIFFORD YELVERTON.”

The man who had written the letter stood in the study at dawn, and looked around it for the last time. Then he laid the letter on the desk and went out into the hall, and put on his coat and hat. He unbarred the great hall door and lifted his eyes to the sky. There was a look of relief on his face—a look of exhilaration. So might a man step out of his prison and realise that Nature belonged to man, that his one inheritance was freedom, and that between him and creation a hidden secret rolled backwards and forwards, in a flux and reflux of silent understanding. The sky—he was unconscious of the underlying perception that not enough of it was visible to please him, that instinctively he panted for broader spaces, for expanses of wide waters, and great spans of heaven, for hilltops and deep ravines, and the great superfluity of distances.

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Then he lit a cigarette. The cool morning air whipped his face, seeming to woo him with a familiar touch. The street was still silent, and the silence brought memories back. This morning the old life whispered once more, telling him of moments they had once had together, laughing scornfully at his desertion, yet triumphant in his return. On the threshold of the door he hesitated, while his heart beat. It seemed to him that he heard a door open above. In another instant he would hear a voice calling him. He must not hear it. He darted out and slammed the door, and walked rapidly down the silent street. A sleepy policeman at the corner saluted him, as he turned the nearest corner.

And on the first floor a window was raised, and a pathetic little figure in a white wrapper, with hair falling around her in great waves, and two childish blue eyes, looked out, and barely caught a glimpse of his tall figure disappearing round the corner. She closed the window and sighed; then she went back to bed again and slept till the maid brought her a cup of tea.

"Has Mr Yelverton come back yet?"

"I don't know, ma'am."

The maid did not know he was out, but she had known him go out early before to-day. He generally came back to breakfast.

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To-day he did not return.

Lucille dressed with that feeling of loneliness, of strangeness, of mystery, which had been her portion ever since she married—the sensation of not understanding life, the feeling of impotence to readjust what had gone wrong, while woefully aware that everything was wrong. She ate her breakfast in silence, in the little methodical way which had so irritated him, taking everything in the correct way—the salt, the pepper, pouring out the coffee slowly, and taking time, consuming nearly half an hour; when he had finished in a moment, counting time for feeding as wasted from the day, sometimes eating little or nothing. A few weeks after their marriage, he had begun taking his cup of coffee away with him into his study, then at last Lucille had cried over it. Couldn't he even spend half an hour at breakfast with her? She only saw him at meals. He had restrained himself from growing angry, and after that had sat, good-naturedly bored, while she finished her breakfast, conscious that her being so well brought up jarred, that something barbarous within him demanded the companionship of a wild, untutored thing, snatching at corn in a field, or picking berries in some wilderness.

After breakfast she interviewed the cook,

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in the deprecating, timid manner of a very young wife, who is aware that she stands in the presence of a connoisseur, who must not be allowed to sound the depths of her own enlightenment.

Then she arranged the flowers, and wrote a few letters at her writing-table.

At eleven he had not returned, and she dressed and went to her dressmaker.

At one o'clock her mother came to luncheon, and commented on his absence.

Mrs Martin was very troubled over Lucille's marriage. Every one had told her that it was a mistake to allow the marriage to take place while Lucille was still so young, just seventeen, and especially with a man like Clifford Yelverton. To be sure, he was at the right age—thirty, the supposed prime of life of manhood's estate; but Clifford Yelverton was a man of no age. He had never been young. It was also likely that he would never grow old. He was a genius, people said, a man who had best leave marriage alone, go his own way; a man who needed no human companionship, whose own thought sufficed him. And it was no good Mrs Martin saying that Lucille was sensible, old for her age. She was merely demure, methodical, but quite a child—a child in sense, without the attributes

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of childhood ; a little old-fashioned thing, as some only girls are apt to be ; painfully sensible and practical, and unable to read character, or understand it, not recognising the strength of individuality—afraid of it ; a little scornful, relentlessly narrow, and still building up ideals on the few novels she had read—audaciously expressing the sentiment that if people would only be sensible there would be no trouble in the world, quite unaware of the fact that, while still afraid of a mouse, she had set about the task of lion-taming. Her little attempts at netting him, had amused Clifford at first ; at last they bored him. He was like a man who has accepted a bouquet of flowers, which for one instant pleased him, but which impeded his progress, his freedom of gait, and which he longed to throw away.

Mrs Martin would never have owned that she had worked hard to bring about the marriage, almost insisted upon it. Still less would she have owned that he was a catch for her daughter. Later, it pleased her to tell her friends, that Lucille might have married any one, but that they had seemed so much in love with each other ; that it was a responsibility to be a mother, one never knew if to interfere, or leave things alone. Lately she had had an

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uncomfortable feeling. Lucille, who had always seemed strong-minded, appeared in the light of a little martyr, who had been sacrificed on the altar of mistakes. She looked much younger as a married woman, than she had ever appeared as a young girl.

The two lunched together. Then Mrs Martin went into the library to borrow a book she had seen there two days ago. On the table she espied the letter addressed to her daughter. Something bulky in its appearance brought about a misgiving. She went to the door and called her daughter, who was in the drawing-room feeding the parrot with some fruit she had brought from the dining-room.

"Lucille, dear, did you know there was a letter here for you?"

Curiosity pierced in the tone of her voice. If they had been married longer, the letter would not have seemed so strange, but somehow. . . .

Lucille came into the room.

"From Clifford! how strange!"

She took it to the window. It was the first letter he had ever written her since their marriage. She wished she was alone.

Her mother, she knew, was watching her, watching the length of the letter. Had they quarrelled? Lucille was very reticent some-

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times. "Oh!" Something of horror in the tones made her mother take a step towards her. The doubts of weeks were verified in that "oh" from her daughter's lips.

"What is it, dear?"

"Oh, don't ask me for a moment, I can't understand it. I must read it again."

Lucille had never seemed to her mother so real, so human, as at this moment of horror, of distress. She had often said that Lucille was not impulsive enough. At this moment she seemed, for the first time, to take her place in the ranks of the living, the palpitating. The girl, the child who had become eighteen since her marriage, read the letter again. Her lips trembled as she turned to her mother, and held out the letter.

"I don't understand it. What does it mean?"

Her mother seized it greedily. She understood too well as she read it, and folded it up, and looked away out of the window. It was awful; but underlying the horror was the satisfaction that her daughter was a rich woman. It was only a few minutes later, that she realised that at eighteen, her daughter's life was ruined, utterly ruined, that she had not even the satisfaction of being a widow, of being able to marry again. She sat silent; then a sound fell on her ears.

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Lucille was sobbing, sobbing as if her heart would break.

"I can't bear it," she said. "I can't bear it. He must come back."

For the first time her mother realised that Lucille really loved Clifford, loved him passionately. She had never thought her daughter capable of love. The situation seemed to have opened the doors of complexity, to be leading out beyond the infinite. Everything that had gone before had been artificial—her life with her daughter in the tiny little house, their attempts at keeping up an appearance without means, the engagement, the marriage, the man's social position, which he disregarded, but which she had coveted for her daughter. The comfort, the wealth, the luxury, which he despised, everything hitherto had seemed to dwell on his possessions; the character, the personality of the man, his place amongst the human's, his heart, the girl's—all this had been overlooked.

To-day the man alone seemed to matter. To-day, when he was no longer there. •

"Oh mother, what are we to do?"

To-day Mrs Martin realised that Lucille had never appealed to her for help before. Lucille seemed to have grown suddenly five years younger.

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"We must send for Mr Twifield."

Mr Twifield was the family lawyer, who had taken charge of their little pittance for them free of charge, ever since her husband's death, and who had rejoiced in their good fortune in securing Clifford Yelverton.

Yes, they would have to consult him, but not to-day.

Not to-day, Lucille had said. It seemed to her that for a few hours she must be allowed to hug her grief, to understand, to cry, then there would be terrible things to face. Her mother stayed with her all night, trying to soothe, to explain, and to understand at once, while her daughter went through all the phases of grief, which such upheaval readily gave rise to.

At one moment she gave herself over to despair, at another she told herself that he would come back. At another she tried to grow resigned; but Mrs Martin noticed that not once did she reproach him. It was as if, for the first time, a glimmer of new light showed her the man, and herself by his side, the wrong woman, unable to cope with his personality.

At one moment she threw herself into her mother's arms with a confidence, an appeal that had never before existed between them.

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"You won't desert me, mother, will you? I have nobody but you." At another she turned upon her mother enraged, as she sought for explanations.

"Did you have any quarrel, dear? Can you, in any way, explain it all?"

Strange ideas floated through the mother's brain. Details of stories, which appear in the newspapers or are not heard in open Court. Was there any mystery of that sort? And her questions maddened the girl. The indelicacy of them nauseated her. Oh, if her mother would only stop questioning her.

The difficulty of explaining seemed greater, now that she was beginning to understand. Somehow, she grasped the situation, and the grasping it filled her with despair. He would never come back, she told herself. She could see him to-day as she had so often seen him, sitting by his window in the darkness, watching the sky, smoking silently. And she remembered how at first she had climbed on to his knee, and asked him what he was thinking about, and he had put one arm around her, awkwardly, and told her of travels of his, of distant countries, of strange, tropical phenomena, of Northern effects of light. And she remembered that his tales had bored her exceedingly, that she had always crept away unsatisfied, melancholy.

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Once he had suggested that they should travel round the world, he and she, and she had told him that she could not leave her mother, that this first year they must be seen together in London, that she must be presented.

The day she was presented at Court on her marriage, he had forgotten all about it, and never returned till late at night. And she had cried, and told him that he did not love her, and he had been vaguely distressed. And she remembered that he had asked her to dress up again, and let him see her, and she had told him that the dress was all laid away now. A hundred times he had hurt her, without meaning to, and always she had cried. Now, to-day, she understood that Clifford Yelverton didn't need a wife who cried, in fact did not need a wife at all. Vaguely she was beginning to realise that he had married her out of pity. She had not understood anything till to-day. Now she understood that a common-place, humdrum life was impossible to him, that he had no code, no laws, no creeds, no ideas of the detail of life, whose mind was enveloped in its own magnificence, wandering along spaces, watching the race of the earth with the stars, grasping at the substance of infinity, the while he lost his

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grasp of the infinitesimal things which are the atoms that form the vast sheet of mystery, which is spread over the world. *He* took the great covering, and cast it across the world, and laid upon it. She examined the warp and the woof and the tiny cross-running threads, and he had grown impatient, and afraid of himself, afraid of breaking away with violence, when the frail creature beside him demanded a tenderness of touch he was unable to give. Only twelve years between them in years, and she a sensible little thing, but between her mind and his, the height of mountains, the depths of an abyss; his, the roar of the lion on the storm-swept cliff, her's the piping of the bird on May mornings, the little bird which is busy with its nest, content with tiny blades of straw. And yet to-day it seemed to her that she, the little bird, understood the flight of the eagle to distant mountain crags.

He had told her of his wanderings, of his experiences, and she asked him to go to the theatre with her. He was bored, bored. He couldn't stand it. Yet, if he had told her better, explained, perhaps, they could have readjusted their life, each gone their way content.

And Mrs Martin, as the night came on,

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was conscious of a feeling of guilt. She remembered the words that had passed between them. How she had told him that Lucille was not looking well, that she needed more amusement, more life, more companionship, and he had answered, with a touch of impatience: "Well, why doesn't she have it?"

He had not understood—that Lucille was too young yet to make her own life, that she had looked to him to guide her, to explain the mystery of living, and that, from very wealth of understanding, he had failed, seeming to her to make mysteries of greatness, the while the secrets of life were plain to him, had ceased to be secrets. He unconsciously scoffing at the cocoon she was spinning, the while he already noted the beautiful colours of the butterfly who had passed the portals of the chrysalis.

"It is wicked of him. He must be a bad, unprincipled man," her mother said, and Lucille had turned upon her, and told her mother to be silent.

CHAPTER II

MR TWIFIELD was very indignant. The man must be crazy, or a villain, he declared. His wrath was in proportion, not only with his friendship for the Martins, but with the increased importance of Lucille Yelverton, as a woman with five thousand a year settled upon her, and a town house, and pretty country place. He, knowing their antecedents, realised as a lawyer, that she had not done badly at all. But he was also a man, and a man who had studied human nature. The question in his mind was whether Lucille would realise these advantages to the same extent as the grief she would feel at the loss of the man. As a man who had known her since infancy, and her father before her, he hoped that she would regret the man, although he was inclined to call him a scoundrel.

He had had an interview with Greene and Hastings. They had been very courteous, including themselves, identifying themselves, with the misdemeanours of their client, con-

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fessing that he had done wrong, laid himself open to suits for desertion, for restitution of conjugal rights. If necessary he would make a divorce possible. They knew him, and had known his father before him, and were convinced that he would do all that was honourable, as long as he obtained his freedom

"He was a man who ought never to have married, especially a young girl. The woman has yet to be born, who would understand Yelverton," the senior member of the firm explained gravely; "but, under the circumstances, we would certainly not advise Mrs Yelverton to sue; but should she do so, Mr Yelverton is prepared to do all she wishes. He deeply regrets any pain or inconvenience he has inflicted."

"Why, she is devoted to him," Mr Twifield had declared, and the fact had taken the firm by surprise. It seemed so incredible that any young girl should care for Clifford Yelverton, the scientific dreamer, the great, sprawling, uncouth man, who looked half savage, half giant, yet who possessed a charm indefinable, which had fascinated Lucille—fascinated her, without her being conscious of it, because of her youthful bewilderment.

Pressed for his address, the lawyers gave

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their word of honour to Mr Twifield, that they did not know it. He had started for Japan, they thought, and had left them power of attorney, with instructions to do exactly as Mrs Yelverton desired. Later on, he would give them an address by which he might be found if anything unforeseen occurred, for instance, in the event of Mrs Yelverton wishing to marry again.

"Marry again! marry again! How can she marry again when her husband is alive?" Mr Twifield had asked testily, and his outburst had been met with a moment's expressive silence. Then, with something of solemnity, the senior member of the firm, placing his finger-tips together, had enunciated a remark, which Mr Twifield was feign to believe the most extraordinary he had ever heard uttered by a respectable firm of London lawyers.

"We understand that our client has, in a letter to Mrs Yelverton, provided for just such a contingency."

"You mean?" Mr Twifield clutched the arms of the chair he was sitting upon and leaned forward.

"I mean nothing, Mr Twifield." The other lawyer spoke stiffly, "Mr Yelverton is a man of a peculiar disposition."

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"He certainly is," Mr Twifield interposed. "I should think that the plea of insanity might even be entertained."

"A peculiar man," continued the lawyer, ignoring Mr Twifield's remarks. "He has no fear of death."

"The very idea is preposterous." Mr Twifield rose from his chair. "Can you imagine Mrs Yelverton being party to such a thing as that?"

"There have been stranger things in my experience, Mr Twifield," he rejoined, rising from his chair, "stranger things than that in my experience, and let us hope that no such emergency will arise."

"Do you realise, sir, that my client, that Mrs Yelverton is only eighteen years of age, and that the contingency we both hope may never arise, is just the one most likely to arise. A beautiful girl, young, disillusioned, wealthy, alone, deserted—why, it might happen in twelve months, or six."

"We must hope that it will not; but if it does, why, it will be time to consider the situation then."

"And you do not think that there is any chance of a reconciliation, of his coming back, regretting?" Mr Twifield spoke with entreaty in his voice. The situation of the

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young woman was becoming more tragic every moment, it seemed to him.

"I fear not." The lawyer spoke with some decision. "We have known Mr Yelverton for some time, and lately he has consulted us a great deal. He has nothing to complain of in his wife's conduct; he makes no charge of any kind, and he has hesitated before taking this step. Three days after his marriage; he already regretted it. He consulted us frequently, and we urged him to try and make the best of it, to avoid a scandal, to try and reconcile himself to his new life. We pleaded with him, I assure you, exactly as if Mrs Yelverton were our client, instead of he; we told him what a cruel, unjust act it would be, and I flatter myself it was our influence which made him put up with the situation as long as he has. They have been married nearly a year. I have never known Clifford Yelverton stay in a place for three months yet. We can understand that you fully appreciate the gravity of his act, but in a sense he is not responsible; he is not like other men."

"I shall, of course, take immediate steps on behalf of my client." Mr Twifield spoke pompously.

"You will be justified, of course," replied his opponent. "We should, of course, do the

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same thing if Mrs Yelverton were our client." He bowed gravely, and Mr Twifield left the office overwhelmed with the mystery of the whole situation.

To Mrs Martin he confided that her daughter could sue for conjugal rights, presently ; after a lapse of time for desertion, although the fact that he had left her his fortune would make this a difficult point to raise. There had been, so far as they knew, neither cruelty, nor infidelity. It would be difficult to bring a divorce, although he had declared that he would submit to it—make it possible.

It was the strangest case Mr Twifield declared—the strangest case in his whole legal experience. Mrs Martin had to explain to Lucille what form her suing might take, if she did make up her mind to sue him. The idea was revolting to her daughter, child as she was, as she had been till the day before, till that very morning, a child with a mind dwelling on small things. She seemed to have sprung into a woman in a night, a woman who could think and feel, and who was conscious of a great loss ; a sentient being, an instrument, across whose chords a great sorrow swept, wringing vibrations of pain, that would tremble and echo on the air for years, the music of which would linger appealingly for a great amen that would

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never come, or which, if it did crash down at last, would break her heart.

She would not go to law, she said, and presently they gave up trying to persuade her. Instead, she said that she would not take his money. She would go back and live with her mother, just as they had lived in the old days, and she would find work.

It was when she came to this decision, that she realised how the world gives way beneath one's feet; the realisation gave her vertigo—mental vertigo, the worst sensation of all. The manner in which her mother took her decision to heart, gave her more pain even than her husband's behaviour. In his act she had seen the workings of a mind in keeping with his personality, with his character, with his whole presentment. In her mother, she realised that she had been used as a means to an end, sacrificed, that she had been considered a trump card in her mother's game with life, and that failing to win, her mother was disgusted with the game.

"My dear child, it is your duty to accept his money. Think of all the humiliation, the trouble he has brought upon us. Think of the gossip there will be." Then, growing hysterical, she added: "And think of me, dear, who, after all these years of sacrifice,

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now in my old age, when I thought that you were settled, provided for in life—why, dear, we simply can't live without it.”

She had always realised that her mother was neither a sensitive, nor a proud woman, yet she had hoped that, in the hour of crisis, she would uphold her in her sorrow; her mother had seemed all she had to turn to. For one instant her heart froze within her, and a longing for her husband, such as she had never felt before, rose in her breast. He had seemed so strong, so powerful, taking life so easily, and making fun of the minor things which had troubled her so—the delinquencies of the servants, the bad fit of dressmakers, the prices of tradesmen. Now to-day, face to face with the tragedy of life, she seemed to see with his eyes how small, how despicable, these things were. And the second night after her husband's disappearance, she relegated her mother to the guest chamber, and elected to sleep alone. She had had no time to think things out, to try and understand, and her mother's constant chatter fatigued her. She had great decisions to come to, and she must come to them alone. While she combed out her hair, with something of the old methodical manner which had so irritated him, she was startled for the first time at her own youthful

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appearance. With her hair down, she looked little more than sixteen. Suddenly the cruelty of it overwhelmed her, and she threw herself on her bed, giving way to sobs, which, while they burned her eyes, salty, acrid, and wrung her heart, yet brought relief. Then gradually the sobs lessened, and she began to think. There were wild ideas of rushing after him, imploring him to return, which were followed by resolves to bear it in silence, the while her whole being recoiled from facing the long vista of loneliness. It was the years which stretched out before her, which dismayed, the long years with the mother who had failed her in the hour of crisis, who wanted her to live on the money the man had given her, who had so humiliated, so wounded her. She had read very few novels, of the less inspiring ones as a girl, but since her marriage, with something of childlike desire to seem grown-up, she had devoured some which she had been forbidden to read. The perusal of them had wiled away many a lonely, weary hour, and taught her more than her husband had. Now to-day, the stories she had read came to her mind. He had treated her like a cast-off mistress, she told herself, and the idea filled her with revolt. Every moment she had belonged to him seemed like an insult,

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the while her whole soul and body called out for him.

Oh, why had she not understood him better? She remembered now how she had cried once, when he had remained nearly all night sitting on the terrace, watching the stars, dreaming, thinking. It had seemed to her then that he had ceased to care for her, never cared for her, and when at dawn he had come to bed, he had found her hysterical with weeping. Now to-day she realised that she had married a strange being who had awed her, but whom she could have conquered. The pathos of her own position, that came later, when she saw strangers leaning towards each other, and whispering and raising arched, pitiful eyebrows. Whether he was unworthy of her love or not, that never entered her calculations. He was gone, and she wanted him back, and something told her that he would never come back.

And to-night she made swift decisions. She would have to live with her mother for a time, while she brooded, and for a few weeks, perhaps a few months, she would keep his money, use it, so as not to hear her mother's reproaches, then she would run away somewhere, earn her living, how she did not quite know.

Presently she fell asleep, exhausted. At

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three in the morning she awoke, with the realisation of something awful hanging over her, which returned presently like physical pain. Yet, reinforced by sleep, a new idea came to her. She rose and went downstairs. She had always been timid at night, afraid. Now, with her new sorrow had come a callousness of the darkness, the silence. The house, half shrouded in shadow, fascinated her. Her husband's house, which was now hers. How old it made her feel, to be mistress of it, this big London house which so many people envied her. She shuddered once, as she looked around. She remembered how she had enjoyed furnishing it, and how his want of interest had pained her. She had grown excited over shades of colour and thickness of tissues, and tried to inveigle him into helping her. She remembered now how he had chosen the most expensive stuff, the most beautiful, and said, with a bored air: "This is what you want," and left the room. And she remembered how, from sheer nervousness in the presence of the man who had brought the patterns, she had followed his choice, the while she doubted its efficacy. Now, to-day, the whole effect of colour fascinated her. He had been right. How did he know?

And she would have to leave it all—all

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that reminded her of him. How shortlived had been her dream of wealth and importance,—of happiness, she told herself now, realising that she had been happy—far happier, for all his apparent neglect, than she had ever been with her mother. She turned on the electric light on her writing-table, and drew paper towards her. He had laughed at her note-paper. He himself never wrote letters, “epitaphs of common-sense,” he called them. If he ever wrote at all, it was on snips of paper he picked up here and there, the corner of envelopes, the blotter, his shirt-cuff,—and it always was the record of some idea, or some calculation, which his mind had insisted on producing out of chaos, as it were. To-night some of these tiny scraps, which had meant nothing to her, lay on the table, and the sight of his handwriting filled her with pain. She began letter after letter, but none pleased her. Something new had come to her, which told her that ordinary commonplaces of life would not suffice him, that she would have to reach out to him, and strike some chord she had never been able to strike into sound before. And she became conscious as she wrote that, even if she succeeded, he would not believe what she wrote. He believed her shallow, narrow, incapable of understanding him. One letter

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after the other she tore up. The one that seemed most likely was a short, childish one, in which she wrote :

“Why have you left me? Do you know how miserable I am? You have broken my heart. I entreat of you, come back to me.”

Had he seen this, he would have come back, but that, too, she destroyed. If he refused to come back, would she ever get over it?

She crept back to bed without having written to him. Her trouble was too great to put into words. Everything, everything sounded trivial, beneath the mark, impossible. Her impotence, her want of knowledge, humiliated her, the while she told herself that she was glad she had not written. Where was he to-night, and did he miss her? Something within seemed to tell her that he had hardly given her a thought, that he was glad of his freedom.

CHAPTER III

It was a matter of some wonder to Lucille's mother, and to Mr Twifield, that Lucille should wish to see the lawyers employed by her husband. There had been one moment when she had thought of paying them a visit, then her courage failed her. Instead, she requested a member of the firm to call, and he did so. His client had desired that he should give her every assistance, every attention, that he should be kind as well as attentive. There had been just a faint touch of emotion, yet barely emotion, only, perhaps, consideration, when her husband had said to the lawyer: "I fear she is rather young to be left quite her own mistress; she will need advice — guidance. Of course, she has her mother." He gave a faint chuckle. There was something so funny in his mind when he thought of Lucille's mother, and of her apparent solicitude for her daughter. The world was a funny place, and its very absurdities interested him. He almost wished well to its

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nonsense ; but he didn't think Lucille would care for her mother's jurisdiction long ; she was the kind of woman who gets found out sooner or later, and yet who is always plausible to the end.

Lucille could hardly have told what prompted her to send for her husband's lawyer. It was, perhaps, only the feeling that they were closer in touch with him, that had led her to this decision ; perhaps the desire to learn more, to pierce what she still called the "mystery" of his departure, and perhaps a little the desire to justify herself in their eyes. Yes, she was conscious to-day, as she sat in an attitude which she strove to make dignified, that, notwithstanding the black dress which she had donned in order to seem older, more impressive, she yet was a pathetic little figure. There was something of appeal in her manner to-day, which had never been there before. And the grave lawyer, the elder member of the firm, had been vastly impressed by her beauty. Yes, she was very pretty, in a childish sort of way, in a way which might end in becoming uninteresting, or intensify. The lawyer was favourably impressed. She was quiet and ladylike, and did not make a scene. She did not cry, or in any way upset his equilibrium by propounding unfathomable

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philosophies, without finality or direct reason, which is so common to women. She kept to the case in point, and only displayed her inner emotions by the reserve with which she held herself in hand. Her husband had often said to her that half the energies of human beings were exhausted in taking a great deal of trouble over people on whom trouble was wasted. She was quite sure that sentimentality would be wasted on the senior member of the firm her husband employed; yet it was the want of sentimentality, which inspired him with sympathy, for now and then there pierced something so true, so convincing, so absolutely trenchant in its simplicity, which left no doubt in his mind that the young wife had been fond of her husband. If he had been dealing with another man, he would have wondered how it was possible that Clifford, or any man, should desert so lovely and young a girl.

There was one moment's awkwardness, as he entered the room. It seemed to so emphasise the situation, to bring back reality with a rush, and with reality, the sense of humiliation. Then something else came to her mind. To the world, to this man, she could only be an object of pity. Right was on her side outwardly, whatever she knew of

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the inner workings of her husband's mind. The certainty of how her youth must appeal, gave her strength in the presence of this man, who had known her husband for years. Yet to-day she had something to say which was for his ear alone, something which she hoped would, in a way, keep her in touch with her husband. She wanted him to understand that she did not want his money, that the man himself was what she desired. When she had said it, she would wait, wait years for the answer, and she asked herself, as she sat and waited in the drawing-room, if the answer would come?

Mrs Martin was amazed at her daughter. She took her breath away. She had wanted to be present at the interview, and her daughter had stated that she wished to be alone. Her decisive manner alarmed Mrs Martin. In the face of it, it was impossible to predict what the girl would do, what she would say. Mrs Martin resented the passive attitude she was forced to adopt, and Lucille's avoidance of reproach of Clifford's act, mystified her, bewildered her, annoyed her. The two discussing his misdeeds, wondering, exclaiming, how soothing it would have been. Instead, Lucille wandered about the house, looking with tenderness at his portrait, fingering the things

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he had touched, laying away, as if they were treasures, the scraps of paper on which he had written.

Mr Greene arrived punctually. It seemed to him that this young woman had, at least, a right to every courtesy, when love and happiness had deserted her. The pathetic figure in black, sitting on the ample sofa in the large drawing-room, would have made him smile, had it not been so pathetic. The room struck him as somewhat austere, and he remembered that Clifford had said that the house appalled him: the old family town mansion, which had been closed for so many years, because the owner was always away — always travelling, or lingering in distant inaccessible countries, communicating with his lawyers from the Rocky Mountains, from Salt Lake city, from the heart of Africa, from the furthest limits of Northern discovery, in brief cables regarding business, which sometimes remained unattended to for years together.

In front of her, on a low table, stood a tray with tea. The silver shone brightly—the little alcohol lamp burned with a discretion which denoted good service. There were signs of wealth everywhere, and on the sofa the image of youth and beauty, even of

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grace, the elderly man told himself, as he seated himself in a chair opposite to her. Wealth and youth, grace and beauty. Only two things were missing — love, and the warmth of happiness; and their absence admitted the shadows of gloom—gave something funereal to the interview.

“You wished to see me, Mrs Yelverton, and I came at once. I know that my client wished me to give you every assistance.”

A faint blush rose to her cheeks, the cheeks of the precocious child, who in one night had become a woman, although she looked like a child still playing at being grown up.

“It is not to ask assistance that I have asked you to come.” The voice was grave, dignified, beyond her years. “I have asked to see you in order to explain, in order to beg of you”—her lip trembled a little—“to convey a letter to my husband, if ever you do write to him.” There was one moment’s silence, while the lawyer wondered what she was going to say, supposed that she was going to make an appeal to him, through himself, to come back. He was mistaken.

“I want you to tell him,” she said, looking away from the man whose gaze disconcerted her, “that I understand, that I know that he could not be happy with me. I was

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too young, I didn't understand," she said, plaintively. "It was my fault, entirely my fault. He is not to blame." Her words made something rise in the lawyer's throat.

"We very much regret our client's action in this matter," he began.

"I do not wish to discuss my husband," she went on in a low voice. "I have realised lately, since——" she broke off, "that he was very patient, that I must have tried him horribly. If——" again she broke off. On her lips were the words: "if he came back, I would be different, I would understand better," but in the face of the man's austerity, she realised that it would sound like an appeal, be undignified. She was looking at it from his point of view, the point of view of the legal man, the point of view of the man of the world, the man in the street. "But I would be grateful to you if you would manage to tell him two things. I want him to know that I do understand, that I do not blame him; but I want him to know that, if ever he changes his mind, he will find me more able to understand."

She was silent for a few moments, while the lawyer anathematised Clifford Yelverton in his mind. This was a very remarkable woman; how was it possible that Yelverton had not

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been able to remain, to understand, to value? He was face to face with almost as strange a personality as Clifford's, in another way. This young woman had unconsciously used the most powerful weapon a woman can use in the presence of a man, but which, unfortunately, women but rarely have recourse to—the weapons of patience and resignation and reserve, through which an infinite, dawning tenderness pierced, without her knowledge.

Presently she went on :

"He wrote me that I could marry again, that if I wanted to, he——" she broke off again. Then went on :

"I want him to know that I shall never marry again, that whatever happens I shall never marry again." She spoke emphatically.

"Naturally you are disillusioned, disappointed. The feeling is a natural one, but at your age, madam, with all your advantages," he had almost said : "with all your beauty," "you will feel differently, you will change your mind."

"Never," she said, "never. Besides, a great deal has been explained to me lately"—she spoke almost in a business-like manner—"by Mr Twifield, by my mother. I understand that the different points I would have to raise, would be . . . unworthy, unworthy of

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him and me. As to his committing suicide to free me, why, the idea is wicked. I want him to know what I think, and I want him to know that if he is ever sick or in trouble, I shall be ready to go to him, wherever he is."

The magnificence of her self-abnegation, of her pardon, amazed the lawyer, and she went on:

"And I want you to ask him one thing. If—if I was ever in any trouble, if I——" her lips trembled, and tears were very close. "If I could not bear the loneliness, the solitude, I want to know if he would come, if only for a moment; if there is one place where a letter would always find him. It would be a great comfort to me."

The simplicity of her request, the sad pathos of it, almost brought tears to the lawyer's eyes. She did not even strive to disguise that she still loved him.

Under his breath, he styled Clifford Yelverton "a heartless brute."

"My dear madam," he tried to make his voice sympathetic, "of course I will do as you wish. I will try and get in touch with him at once. I——"

"No." The girl spoke firmly. "I do not wish you to do that. I do not want you to tell him that I am unhappy, I want him to

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feel perfectly free. I believe——” she spoke musingly now. “I believe that if he knew I were unhappy, he would come; but if he did so, it would be at the cost of his own feelings. He is so clever, so wonderful, that, of course, this humdrum life with me, must be awful. I understand now, and I want him to feel perfectly free. But I should like him to feel also that he could return, that I——”

“I quite understand.” Mr Greene broke in so as to spare her the pain of explaining. “I am sure that if our client had any idea——”

She interrupted him.

“I do not want him to have any idea. You won't tell him, will you?” This time she forgot to be dignified; she was a child again, and he liked her better in this mood. The other manner was too alarming, too magnificent. Once the thought had flashed across his mind that it was not quite natural, that perhaps she was wishing to explain that she was worthy of the fortune he had made over to her; and as if in answer to his thoughts she went on:

“Then there is one other point. I do not want his money. I want you to tell him this.”

“Had I not better try and find his whereabouts, so that you could write to him yourself?”

The lawyer was telling himself that the man

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had acted atrociously, that he must be made to come back. A quick gleam of pleasure shot through her eyes, then it vanished.

"No, I shall not write to him," she said, musingly. "To write would be to take away his freedom, to remind him of my existence, which he wishes to forget. He must be free to carry out his own wishes. Some day, perhaps——"

Her voice was wistful. Suddenly her youth, and the years before her, rose in her mind, resembling a vast desert. Sand upon sand, measureless, as water running though the fingers, intangible almost.

"I am sure that it must come right," the lawyer began. "Mr Yelverton has a peculiar disposition. His father was like him. He has the roaming spirit. His father was just the same for some years, then later he settled down, here, in this very house, and I believe that he and Mrs Yelverton were very happy."

As he spoke, he desired that there might be the same ending to this tragedy.

He meant his words to be comforting. Instead, they evoked the picture of long years of waiting. She saw herself old, grey-haired, waiting on the threshold for an old man with stooping shoulders, and, as if pursuing her thoughts, aloud she said :

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"If he had told me he wanted to travel I would have gone with him."

The lawyer laughed lightly.

"I doubt if any woman could travel where he travels. He has no regard for peril or privation. It would be impossible for you to have accompanied him."

"You think that?" she asked quietly. She was glad that it was so, then, reassuming the business tone, she went on: "I suppose that I shall require a little money, just for a few weeks to finish up things, to pay the servants; then, after that, please inform Mr Yelverton that the money will not be required."

The lawyer was at a loss for a reply. It was the right feeling, a natural feeling, of pride, of justifiable pride, the right kind of pride, but it surprised him. He had gathered the impression, without quite knowing where from, that it had been his money which had attracted the girl, or, at all events, her mother. Without his having said so, Yelverton had conveyed the idea that the mother was dreadful, and the daughter completely under her influence. He knew that they were poor. This wish on her part to renounce her husband's gift, while it increased his admiration, filled him with wonder.

"That my client would never, never permit."

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"It won't be a question of his permitting it." She smiled a little gravely. "It simply will not be touched, but I should like him to know that it is there. Travelling, as he does, must be very expensive, I should think. It would hamper him dreadfully not to have enough."

"He has never travelled luxuriously; he has never used half his income. He has enough."

The lawyer was searching for some plea by which to force her to keep Yelverton's money.

"Well, of course, that is his business." She spoke as if the money were a matter of no moment.

"I hope that you will reconsider this decision; it would hardly be fair."

She looked up inquiringly.

"Hardly fair?"

"Well, not fair on either of you. He has made you suffer."

The quick blood rose to her cheeks.

"He has given you a high position which you have to keep up, and if you consider it in a proper light, you have a right to it."

"Oh, I dare say I have, but that is not the point. I do not require the money. I shall give up the house. I shall leave London. Perhaps, Mr Greene, it would be

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well to let the house—the two, this one, and Merle's Nest; what do you think?"

"If you are not going to use them, by all means." The lawyer was again the man of business. "I dare say that the associations are painful ones."

As he spoke, she looked around the room slowly. She was not sure whether they were painful or not. As he spoke, it seemed to her that she would hate going away. Her mother's small house rose in her mind. The lawyer leaned a little forward across the tea-table.

"Does it not strike you, Mrs Yelverton?" To call such a young thing "Mrs" seemed absurd. "Don't you think that you owe it to him to allow him to make every atonement in his power?"

"I never thought of that."

"That would certainly be the point of view of every right-thinking person."

"But nobody quite understands, you see."

"I certainly think that you ought to keep up the name, his position, your own. Have you considered at all, Mrs Yelverton, how you are going to explain the position to the world, to your friends? Might I suggest that it would be a great mistake to tell any one? Would it not be better to give out that he

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had gone away on a journey, on a voyage of exploration? Every one knows what a traveller he is. A scandal should be avoided if possible—for your own protection, I mean. He might take it into his head to come back. It is quite on the cards.”

“I don’t think he will come back. And, you see, if I went away, disappeared, no one could ask questions, no one could know.”

“I see your argument, but——”

“Well, I will consider that question. I will let you know in a day or two.” She spoke a little wearily, and he rose to go.

“Oh, I never offered you any tea, how stupid of me.” She took up a cup with one slim, girlish hand, and began pouring out the tea with the other.

“No, thank you, I never take tea—it’s poison.”

She smiled.

“Such nice poison,” she said. She rose to say good-bye, to ring the bell.

“Good-bye, Mrs Yelverton.” There was something fatherly in the way he spoke. “I will do all you wish,” and he lowered his voice a little. “Will you promise to do nothing rash without consulting me?”

“Yes, if——”

“I know what you are going to say. I

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am not to betray secrets. Not a word, but you know wonderful things happen, why, we might get a cable from him in a day or two," he added cheerfully, "it is quite on the cards. Ah, you don't know him as we do. The fact is, he mustn't be reckoned with as if he were quite like other people." He touched his forehead. "Too much learning, don't you know."

"You have been very kind in coming." Lucille smiled sweetly. At the door the lawyer turned.

"I daresay I shall have some news in a day or two. Will letters reach you here?"

"For the present, oh yes."

When he had gone, she stood looking at the door, dazed. The last link with her husband had vanished behind that door. Now nothing was left but to try and forget, to try and do something that would bring oblivion, hasten the tread of the years. To-night she must come to some decision, or she would go mad. For the first time, now that Mr Greene had gone, she realised that Clifford Yelverton, her husband, had passed out of her life, that she was alone in the world. Her mother didn't count.

CHAPTER IV

It would have been difficult even for Clifford Yelverton to explain what his feelings were, when he walked away from his home, with the determination never to re-enter it. He felt some regret at leaving Lucille, principally on account of her youth. Later he would feel still more regret, because he would forget all the little things that had irritated him, and remember that he had committed an act of cowardice. This morning, walking in the cool air, his first emotion was one of intense relief. The old life seemed to nestle up to him, to rejoice with him at his emancipation. The act which had prompted him to write to Lucille and to turn his back on the house for ever, had been one of impulse. Yet it had followed on a deliberate determination, and it had been the outcome of his disbelief in her affection, in his belief that she was shallow, the while a passionate adoration would have driven him to madness.

He had never quite understood why he

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had married her, or how it had come about. He had always realised that his profession was not that of marriage. Vaguely, perhaps, he had realised that it was his duty to marry, because one day he would be Lord Traverty, and Lord Traverty would have to have an heir, or the title would go to some distant cousin. But he had never given a thought to his title. It rather bored him, and probably, when he came into possession of it, he would travel about as "Smith" or "Jones." His father had died before his old uncle, the present Lord Traverty, and the old man still lived on, rejoicing in his longevity, and disbelieving the fact that Clifford Yelverton didn't care if he died or not. When he heard of his marriage he chuckled. "Who is the unfortunate woman?" he asked, conscious that there was very little of the marrying man in the Yelvertons. When he heard of the engagement, he said: "I bet Clifford will forget all about the day of the wedding. They'll find him on the top of Mount Horeb."

But he had reckoned without Mrs Martin. She had kept him penned, like a fattened hen, till the hour of sacrifice. He had realised at the altar that something really final was going on, which was unlike the methods of

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his life, which had all been vague; and he had been half amused, half bored at the ceremony, comparing it, in his mind, with that of barbarous countries, noting the differences, the origins of forms of worship. The honeymoon had been a huge fatigue, an awful trial from which he thought he had emerged triumphantly, if a little awkwardly. Her prattle had sometimes amused him, but never interested him; but he had tried to bend his mind to things which she seemed to think important, such as her clothes, the delinquencies of her maid, the letters from her mother, saying how glad she was to think her Lucille was so really happy, had such a dear man to look after her. He smiled grimly at being called a "dear man." He didn't think the appellation suited him, and he hoped he would be able to take care of Lucille. So far she hadn't seemed to need anything. Yet when she nestled in his arms, something tender, of protection, almost fatherly, had warmed his breast. Later it had become odious to him to have to caress her, to be bound day and night. A week after their marriage, he had longed to go off somewhere for a week alone. The feeling that he mustn't had been awful. But he hoped that she would be satisfied with what he could

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give her. He knew that her mother was satisfied. It had been principally to satisfy *her*, that he had married the daughter. It had seemed the right thing to do, and he didn't believe that he regretted more marrying Lucille, than any other women. It would have been always the same. One or two widows, and an Italian peasant had nearly married him. He did not quite know how he had escaped. He was too easy-going, he told himself.

It had begun in this way. Lucille's father had been a man of science, a professor at Cambridge, and a really clever man, in the broad sense of the word, and he had been his father's intimate friend. Mrs Martin had borne this in mind, when, after years of travel, she saw the announcement in the papers of Clifford's arrival in London. If he was like his father, he would hate Society, she told herself, and be of those men who disregard the social position of their friends, or their wealth, and who are true to old friends, to the children of their father's friends. She wrote him a letter asking him to come and see the widow of his father's oldest friend. She had not mentioned her daughter, and the daughter had been something of a surprise. Mrs Martin lived just outside London,

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in a tiny cottage which appealed to him. His two nights in London had stifled him, and the setting in which he found Lucille had charmed him. He hadn't thought that there were cottages like this in England, not where ladies lived. He had dined with his sister in Grosvenor Place, and the pomp had wearied him. He hated evening-dress. But the pretty, flower-embowered cottage in which Mrs Martin lived, with her daughter and the old servant, had seemed to him delightful, and Lucille the heroine of everybody's poems. Fragments of Tennyson came to his mind every time he looked at her, for he was instinctively a poet, a poet who laughed at sentiment. Presently it became his habit to go down two or three times a week to the little cottage, where Mrs Martin allowed him to sprawl on the lawn, and to smoke at will, where he could just go into dinner without dressing, and talk or not as he liked. Lucille's domesticity had pleased him. The little homely duties she undertook, were invested with the charm all men find in a woman who does not assert herself. When he left them standing at the little gate in the glow of after-dinner twilight, or in moonlight, and heard their voices calling out good-night across the honey-perfumed air, he left them

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with regret. One day, perhaps, he would treat them as he treated everybody, and disappear beyond the horizon somewhere, far away, where the sun would rise at the hour it fell on the little cottage, but just now it pleased him to get away from the *va et vient*, the bustle of London in the height of the season. But people who came within Mrs Martin's clutch did not disappear so easily. She had had dreams for Lucille, and she realised that her dreams were crystallising. Traverty—the ineligible eligible, the man who had been forgotten by the scheming crew of London mothers—was within her grasp, and it behoved her to sacrifice her self-respect even, rather than to relinquish her hold on this man who seemed heaven-sent. She had sent out her Rebekah to water his camels, and this Isaac, whose tents had been pitched afar, must abide with them. She did not even enquire of the maiden, as Rebekah's parents did. She told her that Clifford Yelverton was the ideal, and the girl, having seen no one else, believed it.

By proxy, Mrs Martin wooed him for her daughter, wooed him with moonlight and summer fragrance, and all the things that were most unlike herself, and fed him with wholesome food. Then presently she appealed to his heart. They were dreadfully poor, and

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she had no opportunity of giving Lucille a London season, or of introducing her into Society. If anything happened to her, Martha Martin, Lucille would have to work. It sounded most piteous, and it seemed almost a duty to marry the girl. The idea had amused him, too, the idea of marrying this obscure little girl, when his sister was trying to make him pay some attention to Lady Betty Hanbury. It struck him that when he wanted to travel, she would be quite happy here with her mother. Gradually, with the same stealthy step with which summer creeps on to the earth, small things had grown to be a habit. Lucille had begun to have a flower ready for his button-hole, learned to meet him halfway across the field, which divided them from the road that led from the station. Mrs Martin left them more and more frequently alone. The girl had been sincere, he was sure of that. She was not a schemer, and he had not blamed the mother for scheming. She was within her right. Now and then, when Lucille was cutting flowers in the garden, he would embark on a passage of poetry, which made her shy, and ask her if she knew what it was out of. She rarely knew, but he had grown tired of clever people. He had met so many. It was her simplicity which charmed him, and the

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way they both discussed domestic questions before him—whether the eggs had come, whether there was enough milk left over to make a custard. Once he had been dispatched to a neighbouring farm, with Lucille, to fetch a chicken, and had brought it back in his arms.

These things Mrs Martin knew would appeal to him. It was so delightful that with him she could give herself up to simplicity, and yet be sure that she was reaping a fourfold harvest. Just such a girl he would marry one day, he told himself, but not yet. Then one day the roving spirit had come over him again, and he had spoken of Morocco—Morocco was the only country not yet overrun with tourists—and Mrs Martin looked grave. After dinner, seated on the terrace, she told him that she feared Lucille would be broken-hearted. His brief sojourn under their roof seemed to him, suddenly, like a crime. He had always hoped that women would consider him without the pale. He always forgot his wealth, his title, his semi-barbarous charm, the mingled charm of the man who cannot help being a gentleman, the while he is trying to act as the peasants ought to act, and don't; whose want of correctness only meant that instinctively he realised that he had no need to be correct—that he was of those who could start a fashion if they

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wished. Then one evening when they were in the garden together—he had not told her that he cared for her, that would not have been quite true, and he would not have imagined that she would believe him, he was such an unlikely kind of man to be in love, but he had asked her, quaintly :

“Do you think you could put up with this funny man, and come away with him? We will visit Mars, and have a little house built out of the ice in a glacier.”

He had spoken to her as he would to a child. He would have liked to build her a raft, and float down some silent Indian river, with her beside him, for a little time, till he wanted to be alone.

She had looked at him bewildered, and wondered if he was wooing her.

“Yes, I would like to come,” she said, and instinctively she had laid her hand in his. The warm pressure, the diffidence, the shyness, had brought some rush of feeling, the feeling which is latent in the breast of every man.

“Then we will step forth and conquer the world together,” he had said, laughing. “It will sometimes be very cold, and sometimes very hot, and sometimes we shall have nothing to eat but squirrels, and nuts, and berries, but we will seek for honey in the

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trunks of trees, and watch the bears being stung by the bees."

He spoke strangely, but it fascinated her. It reminded her of Hans Andersen's fairy tales.

She had not realised quite that he invited her to lead the life which, with him, had become the nomad life.

Then one day he had kissed her shyly, and she knew that he was going to marry her, for he was not the kind of man to marry anybody he was not going to take care of. Later he had told her mother that, if she didn't think Lucille too young for him, if she thought he could make her happy, he would like to marry her. Mrs Martin was discretion itself. It would be a great comfort to her, she said, and Lucille cared for him, had never yet cared for anybody, was heart-whole. She did not know that she was telling the truth. The funny man, half old, half young, good-looking, yet rough, tender, as a great bull might be tender, full of delightful stories, and so different to everybody else, frightened Lucille, the while he fascinated her hugely. What her mother had told her of his position, his money, she only half believed. Most of all the idea of marriage, of a change, enchanted her, and the big mystery of being

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loved, of loving. Once or twice, it seemed to her that she understood him. Once or twice she wished he would not always treat her like a child, a child in a fairy-tale. He called her the "princess of the honeycomb, the girl with the amber eyes." And he half irritated her, half enchanted her with a thousand tales. He had met a common, vulgar bird who said she was proud, that she only liked the robin because he could afford a red coat, and the skylark because he had been to the *conservatoire* and could sing, but that she never had a crumb for the sparrows. After that he called her the lady with the heart of icicle, "The belle dame sans merci."

London had wondered for quite an hour after it saw the announcement in the paper, but no one wondered quite so much as Clifford Yelverton himself.

Suddenly he felt as if he had been entrapped, as the Siberian entraps the silver fox whose coat is needed for a fair princess.

CHAPTER V

THEN had come ten months of what had seemed to him unendurable experience, the experience of a man who, different to other men, has daily to descend to the commonplaces of life, to the things he has always despised, abhorred. The folly of humanity in reducing life to a system, had always amused him. How they frittered life, these human beetles who tied themselves to the stake of their own folly, the while they tried to devise ingenious methods for getting free from it, or beguiling the time of their imprisonment, while freedom, and grand phenomenon, and the revelation which comes to the watcher, waited outside, and invited, and scoffed, and invited again, then turned away from them disgusted. And now to-day he had to join in the comic opera, because his young wife demanded it, and it chafed him to sit and play at sham life with a child. So might he have poured out cups of tea that were not tea, and cut slices of mud pies. But the recording angel would

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at least have this to say, that for the first few months he did his best, and his best for him, with his nature, his disposition, was something gigantic. The elephant, learning to dance, is not exposed to more gigantic effort, and he was about as clumsy. Now and then he would give in to her wish that he should drive with her, or accompany her to some party; but he hated it, and would chafe the whole time. Sometimes he would try and divorce his own temperament for ever, and fall in with her methods, with a species of despair, with the realisation that it was no good to fight for freedom any longer, that he might as well give in gracefully and live on the grass, kicking his legs, now that he had fallen from heights. When he resolved on this course of action, he became charming. He talked with ease and charm, and played the comedy better than anybody else, interspersing his remarks with amusing, quaint expressions, which betrayed the intelligent soul, yet which he treated with sarcasm, because the fools he was playing to would be afraid of seriousness, —write him down a bore.

“I had no idea you could be so delightful. Why, you were positively brilliant last night; the Elliotts said they had never enjoyed anything so much in their lives. You really

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can be very amusing," Lucille had said to him. He laughed uncontrollably at her remarks. Was it possible that they had thought him amusing, that he had seemed brilliant? Good God! was it possible that they called that brilliant, that they had been satisfied? He thought of a man he knew, far away in a monastery, who was trying to discover a cure for leprosy. Of another, who spent his nights studying the stars; of others, a host of them, who had seemed to get so far along in science, that they beat their heads against the very walls of heaven, and nothing was left to them but some revelation, which would verify the theories, which had been handed down for hundreds and thousands of years: men who talked of prehistoric animals, calling them familiarly by name, as if they were barndoor fowl; and he wondered how it was possible that a big city should still contain such a vast amount of buffoons. Yet it was with an amused tolerance, that he performed his part in the kinematics of Lucille's life. He had married her, and he felt suddenly like a man who has become a widower, and is left alone with a child he has never had anything to do with, who finds himself suddenly face to face with problems, whose very simplicity seemed to make them

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complex. How wonderful it was, the many little things in her life which seemed to lead to nothing, to be repetitions of themselves, and how was it possible to talk so much nonsense? He was far better, Lucille told him, when he was like everybody else, when he gave himself up to the froth of life, and talked and chatted and fooled about, as he expressed it.

"You really are growing much younger," she had told him once; and in a sense she was right. Nobody gets anything out of one life, out of the one idea. It is the snips and snaps of things, the crumbs which fall, not from the rich man's table, but from the passer-by, which are profitable—a good investment. The man of varied life is the one who enjoys life. Then, as the summer advanced, the craving for travel returned, the craving which, without his knowing it, was the artistic one for effect of colour; for there are more artists who do not paint, than artists who discuss effect on canvas. He was at once a dreamer and an artist and a roamer, and his confinement hurt him, warped his nature, made him at once bitter and irritable. And what he hated most was a man who could be irritable to a woman, who could be disagreeable to his wife, the while the strain was more than he

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could bear. He was a wild thing at heart, a wild thing who had lain at night in forests, and gone to sleep to the noise of the susurrus of the wind in the pines, and awakened to meet the orange lips of the rising sun, kissing the dark tops of the trees, and turning them to purple-red; gone to sleep on the sand, to wake and find the waves kissing his feet, and sometimes not gone to sleep at all, but wandered across deserts, afraid to go to sleep, furrowing the sand as if his body were a plough, emerging exhausted, but triumphant, from places where the silent tread of the Indian had failed. He had traced the lion, the panther, the tiger to their lair, and climbed mountains to find a tiny plant no bigger than a daisy; and he had dreamed, God! how he had dreamed, by rivers, by streams, by brooks, by rivulets, beneath the moon and the stars, the sunshine, and even beneath the rain, the storm. The voices of Nature lured him, lured him; and he had learned many of its secrets, and found that it was profound, full of design, of purpose of thought renewed, with ever-resurrecting vigour. Eternity—he had gauged its power, realised that it lay in the fact of its unceasing continuity of thought, its constant revival, its evenness, its rhythmic recurrence, undaunted,

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pursuing. Nature never failed in a surprise, the while the humans seemed to him the most transparent of God's creations, who had misused speech, and rendered it second in power to Nature's gift of eloquent, enwrapping silence, limiting force of expression, by an influx of words. There were days in London when he hated the noise of busy sound, hated it like one who listens for one cry from afar off, and fears that the closer vitalistic sounds, striking on a nearer air, will prevent his hearing it. And it was the nights in London which he hated most, the nights when he wanted to be alone, to sit up and read, or dream, or walk. Once or twice he had not been able to restrain himself, and had gone out at midnight, while his wife was at a party, or before she returned from the theatre, and had not come back till morning.

Always there had been a scene. In the morning her eyes, heavy with tears, with restlessness, with want of sleep—had reproached him, and the vastness of her discomfort, in proportion with his, had driven him to despair. He was conscious, too, of Lucille's disappointment, conscious that her mother, Mrs Martin, reproached him in her heart. And in the midst of the activity, the purposeless activity, around him, the cry for freedom voiced itself

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daily with growing intensity. Then one day he had told himself that he must cut away, or he would kill somebody. It would be better to do so at once. Later, who could tell, there might be children; he could not leave this child with the responsibility of others. Now she could readjust her life, graft it into some other plant, a plant more normal, more yielding, more accustomed to cultivated gardens. As for him, he needed the desert, height, space, and, hardly knowing how feverishly he wrote it, he had sat down and written the letter, almost without remorse, relentless, brutal in his wish to get away from the puny things of life, amongst which he counted Lucille, the child-wife who did not understand.

Now he hardly gave her a thought, as he walked across London, almost without noticing that he was in a big city. So he had walked through Fez, through Mecca, through Constantinople, through Florence, through San Francisco. These hives of humans disgusted him, the places where the human bees stored the honey, while his being craved for the outside fields where the honey was gathered. This was a tossed-up heap, and he sought the beginning of things primeval.

The same day, after visiting his solicitors,

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he had crossed the channel. The old life had reasserted itself. For many days he gave no heed to his act. The business point of view—that he never considered about anything. He was an eccentric, a vagabond at heart, revelling in wayside hedges. He was alone, and his nature was rising, rising again. Oh, how good it was to be alone. He avoided the places where he had told his solicitors that letters would find him. He didn't want letters. He knew what they would contain. He intended to lose himself, who knew every corner of the earth, to lose himself, to set *her* free, the while he freed himself. Of the enormity of his act, he was not even aware. The world would blame him, of course, but then it blamed everybody, everything. It didn't know. If they wrote, it would be to call him back, and he would never go back, never. He never wanted to see London again. This time he would go further than he had ever been before, he had enough money for that. He had always travelled like a pilgrim. It was the only way to enjoy, to see, to learn. Everywhere he led the life of the peasant of that country. And he had friends, strange friends, who understood him. A gondolier in Venice, a tobacco-planter in South Carolina, a hermit in an Asiatic desert, with those he

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would sojourn at some time or other. This time he avoided women more studiously than usual. He had nothing in common with them.

It was many years before he received the letter in which his solicitors, Greene and Hastings, sent him his wife's messages, and told him that she had refused his money. When he received it, he realised that much might have happened in those years, that it was too late to do what she asked. But he felt a little dismayed at the thought that she had returned to her poverty. It had been the thought that he had left her rich, which had seemed to him to atone for everything.

For several days after he received it, he was conscious of discomfort, of a feeling of antagonism. The letter seemed to voice that he was not completely free, that he had duties to perform. For years he had left the letter unanswered, although he caught himself thinking it over now and then. It appealed to the chivalry in him, the chivalry which she must have disbelieved in. Had she never wanted him in all these years? No, other letters to different places did not mention her again. Then one day, on the steps of Sheppard's hotel, he lazily picked up a society paper, which had been left on a table by a guest.

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"It is rumoured that the beautiful Mrs Yelverton, whose husband's sudden disappearance eight years ago, leaving his young wife apparently for no reason, caused such a sensation, is about to marry again. There have been rumours of this before, but the devoted wife refused to consent to an engagement till she was convinced of her husband's death, hoping against hope that he would return. Now, there seems little doubt that Mr Yelverton's body was picked up amongst the seven unfortunate victims of the Griegsen expedition, and it is to be hoped that in her new venture, in which Mrs Yelverton has everyone's sympathy and congratulations, she will be luckier than in her first, and reap the reward of her devotion and constancy in many years of matrimonial bliss."

The *fiancé* was described as a rising Member of Parliament, a man of good position and good-looking. The paper was a month old; probably she was married by this time. He smiled at the idea of being one of the seven killed in the Griegsen expedition. He had never started with it. Griegsen was no good as an explorer, knew nothing about the North Pole. He, Yelverton, had been five hundred miles further with a Frenchman called Deunier, and returned unharmed. The ignorance of the papers amused him. It amused him to see that he was supposed to be dead. This was freedom indeed beyond his dreams. Eight years! was it possible that it was eight

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years? She was—let's see—twenty-six now. He wondered if she had changed, if he would know her again, if she would be happy. Why had she waited eight years, since he had said that he would never return—never? What had she thought he would do? Then another idea sobered him a moment. If she were going to be married he could never appear in England again as Clifford Yelverton. He could never claim his title even. The idea amused him at first, then gradually it took possession of him and assumed a serious aspect. He had wanted to disappear, now life, circumstances, events, insisted on his disappearing. If he did his duty, he could never be seen again. By his own act, he had made himself an outcast, a pariah, for ever. The moral, the religious point of view, he had not given a thought to yet. He would presently, perhaps, but only from her point of view, or that of the world. He had no established moral code, no theories, no religion, yet he was neither immoral, nor a disbeliever. Forms of worship, creeds—he had regarded them always half with interest, half with amused tolerance. They were the pivot to which each nation tied itself in a different knot, for fear it should be blown away. His

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own God was Nature, and the wisdom of Nature, his Bible. Presently, having come of Christian civilised British stock, he would have to recognise his participation in a crime, the fact of his having led to Lucille's having committed a crime. Only two courses were open: the one—perhaps he was already too late with that, she might be married—that one would have been to tell her, the world, that he was alive. The other, the only one, was to be silent, silent for ever, to be dead, indeed: to kill himself, or to live always away from the haunts of men; an outcast, an alien from his own country, from every civilised quarter of the globe; a man with a new name, or without one at all, a Cain without the brand of God on his brow. Never again could he write a letter to a friend, or communicate with the outer world. Never again! His first impulse had been to go and telegraph to his lawyers, to tell them that he was alive, that this marriage must be stopped. The papers did not say when it was to take place. Then he realised that his agreement with Lucille forbade his doing this. In his haste to regain freedom, he had promised to provide for this very contingency. Fool, fool that he had been, to place the halter of marriage around his own neck!

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And she, the girl, by what right did he dare to keep her from happiness, who had only given her pain? No, there was only one thing to do. His resolves were like himself, grand, magnificent. He had ruined his own life. He had no right to ruin hers. There were huge catastrophes like this which overtook men, and they had to be met with the same magnificence with which the mountain meets the storm. He must cease to be Clifford Yelverton. Almost he was glad that it was a big catastrophe, in keeping with his personality, with his thoughts. It reminded him of his own ideas. He put it out of his mind, and went to assist, in company with some intelligent "beys," and a German professor, the excavation of a newly-discovered mummy, which was to be removed from a tomb near the Pyramids. The interest of the afternoon drove the remembrance of what he had read in the papers from his mind.

It was not till he awoke once in the night that he remembered that he could no longer be Clifford Yelverton. Not a moment longer. He went to sleep again laughing, as if it were a huge joke. After all, there was nothing at all in personality, if the fact of his changing his name altered his life. How often he had taken another name. For the next few days

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he read the papers, procured those in time which followed on the one he had read, but he never saw Lucille's name mentioned again. Perhaps the one which recorded the marriage had not reached him. Perhaps she was not going to be married just yet. He could imagine that if she had waited eight years, she would still hesitate. The next day he took out his solicitors letters, and smiled to himself. It was not wonderful that she had changed her mind; yet he read over the message, one of those she had sent him.

"Mrs Yelverton begs us to inform you that if, at any time, you alter your decision, no matter at what distance of time, no matter how many years hence, she will still be waiting to receive you."

The message had hardly touched him when he received it. Now, to-day, he felt a little sorry that she had not adhered to her resolution, a resolution which set her so far above other women.

Once an impulse seized him to find out if the marriage had taken place, and if it had not, to return. Then the impulse vanished into thin air. To do this would be to return to bondage, to the life which he had made every effort to get rid of. No, there was nothing

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for it but to accept oblivion, annihilation, to become one with the rank and file of the unknown. He rapidly set about his arrangements for a voyage which would take three years, and enable him to get accustomed to his new presentment to the world.

With a touch of grim humour, he laughed as he thought of the money rolling up at the bank, which she had refused to touch, and which he could never draw upon. It was odd to think of money slowly multiplying, while so many needed it.

A month later he read in the papers that his uncle, Lord Traverty, was dead. Then he sailed for the North Pole. The solicitors had not communicated with him. They thought that he was dead. But huge advertisements appeared, offering rewards for information regarding him. And Lucille still waited. It was not true that she was engaged to be married.

CHAPTER VI

AT twenty-five, Lucille Yelverton was one of the most remarkable women in London, remarkable in a way which excited the curiosity of men and women alike. After much consideration, she had resolved on accepting enough of her husband's money to keep herself and her mother in a position that befitted her station in life, and had refused to accept the balance. She had weighed the whole position with a business acumen, which had simply staggered both Mr Twifield and Clifford Yelverton's lawyers. This was the way she argued. She could no longer afford to keep up either the house in London, or the country place, Merles' Nest. There was no reason for her doing so. The two places, which belonged to her husband had, as long as he lived with her, necessitated a certain expenditure in keeping them up. As his abandoned wife, there was no necessity to keep them up; they had better be rented, and the income from the rental she accepted. She

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realised, however, that something was due her for the price of her disillusion, the price of her forfeited happiness, the price of the scandal, which, hug the secret how she might, would still attach itself to her name, to her position. For this reason, and this only, she accepted her due, the rentals of the two houses, which amounted to about fifteen hundred a year. In vain her mother remonstrated; the girl she dealt with now, was not the Lucille of old days. She was a strange personality which had sprung from the idiosyncrasies of Clifford Yelverton, from the abnormal circumstances which had weaved themselves around her married life. There was something akin to the personality of Clifford Yelverton, in the way she fashioned codes of her own, and launched arguments which, although not orthodox, held in them the elements of common-sense. She put a price on Clifford's desertion, and that price was fifteen hundred pounds a year. Nothing that the lawyers suggested would alter her decision.

"If I were a widow, a widow without children," she told them, "I should have had a dowry of fifteen hundred a year, and the heirs would have had the house, the place, everything else. I wish to have just exactly what would have been my portion as a widow."

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In vain the lawyers, forgetful of loyalty to their client, in the presence of the child-wife, argued that in the face of the desertion, of his gift, she was entitled to anything she wanted; she would not listen to their arguments.

"I am, practically speaking, in the position of a widow," she told them, and something laconic in her remarks made them wonder. Was it this business acumen which had been her undoing with a man who was half-poet, half-savage, and altogether a dreamer?

With her fifteen hundred a year she had taken a small, but very pretty flat, and invited her mother to live with her.

She had taken her mother's breath away by the way she invited her.

"I shall be glad, mother, if you care to live with me," she had said; "but we must understand each other. You are never to mention Clifford's name to me; you are never to interfere with me in any way. I shall go my way, and you yours. You have a small income which will suffice you. Together we have about two thousand a year. If you want anything more, I shall be happy to give it you; but you have failed me at the moment I most needed you, you must forgive me if I elect to choose my own mode of living."

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They had had a scene, in which Mrs Martin had upbraided her for her want of affection.

"There was one moment," Lucille replied, "when you could have lifted me to heights, saved my self-respect, my pride, been tender. It was when I wanted to go back to you, to live the old life as a girl. You told me that you could not afford it. For this reason, and no other, I have accepted that portion of my husband's income which I consider my due. Let it suffice you that I have accepted money from him against all my most sensitive feelings, and please do not refer to the matter again."

Her mother, with something of terror, had accepted the position, salving her conscience by the argument that her daughter could not live without her.

The first day that they had settled down in the flat, her daughter had said to her: "I am going to tell people that Clifford has gone on a voyage of exploration; you will please tell them the same thing. • The day that I hear that anything else has been said, I will go away."

Terrified, the mother had acquiesced. Whether she had kept her bond, whether she spun different tales amongst her cronies,

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that Lucille never knew; she did not want to know. She had embarked on a scheme, and that scheme she would see through to an end. The first person to call upon her was Clifford's sister, Lady Macfarlane, the wife of a Scotch peer who had some weight in the Cabinet, the sister whose dinner-party had so oppressed him. Her solicitors were the same as her brother's. The firm had acted for the family for four generations, and Mr Greene, the senior partner, had voiced his disapproval of her brother's act.

"The most charming little lady I have ever met," he told Lady Macfarlane. And she had driven straight from the lawyers office, to Lucille's flat.

There was a good deal more dignity in Lucille's reception of her sister-in-law, than in Lady Macfarlane's outburst.

"We have never met," she exclaimed, "but I feel that in this dreadful trouble we must be sisters to each other. Do—do tell me what has happened, what has become of Clifford."

The girlishness of Lucille, made Lady Macfarlane feel like crying.

"Why, it's preposterous!" she said. "I assure you, dear—by-the-by, what is your name?"

"Lucille." The girl uttered her own

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name in a manner at once dignified and child-like. The personal appearance of Lady Macfarlane reminded her of Clifford, gave her confidence, inspired a sensation of stability, in the midst of chaos. His sister was here in London, seated in her room. It could not be that Clifford would never return. He must come back to the old ties, if not to the new.

"Lucille! what a pretty name! Dear, you don't know how we feel for you, but you must help us. Where is Clifford?" Then, patting Lucille's hand affectionately, for this woman was not an adventuress, seeing that she had refused his money: "Tell me, dear, did you quarrel about anything? Is there any misunderstanding which could be put right?"

In the presence of this woman who was his sister, who was straightforward and honest, as became the wife of a Scotch laird, Lucille laid aside her pose.

"There was nothing, Lady Macfarlane." She spoke hopelessly.

"Alice," put in Lady Macfarlane, and Lucille smiled.

"Alice, he often spoke about you," she said to her sister-in-law. "He was very fond of you."

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She put out her little hand, and clasped that of her sister-in-law.

"I don't think," she went on, "that we must make a fuss about it. You know I didn't understand him. He was not like other people."

"That he certainly wasn't," put in her sister-in-law. "He was always rather peculiar, but then we hoped that when he was married——"

"I don't think he was a man who ought to have married." Lucille spoke demurely.

"Certainly, he wasn't," put in his sister. "Oh dear, how distressed our mother would have been."

Lucille found it impossible to enter into the feelings of a mother-in-law, who had died before she had married Clifford, or known him.

"I don't think we ought to judge him," she went on. "You see I was too young to understand him. Perhaps, if I had been older, this would not have happened. I think women are not told enough: don't you think so, Lady Macfarlane?"

"How good you are," murmured Lady Macfarlane.

The girl's passivity, her magnanimity, nettled her.

"He was always strange," she went on.

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"Once he slapped our governess, because she gave him a punishment he didn't deserve. He was quite right in a way; he really had done nothing wrong."

Lucille laughed.

"Isn't that just like him; I wish I had been there."

Lady Macfarlane edged up closer to the girl on the sofa.

"You do believe in him, don't you, dear; you think, as I do, that he is a wonderful man, very clever—a genius."

Lucille's face blanched.

"Lady Macfarlane, he is the most wonderful man in the world. Do you think I could bear it all if I did not——"

She broke off. On her lips were the words, "If I did not love him."

Lady Macfarlane had never been in the presence of quite such an oddity. Vaguely, she recognised that this was just the kind of girl her brother would have married, and she went on in her commonplace, British way, which is always "bourgeois" when it has not been mated with the cosmopolitan.

"You know, dear, we always feared that he would marry some one who was not quite—you know, my dear. There were dreadful tales about him in Salt Lake city. We heard

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that he was a Mormon, or something of that sort. We were dreadfully worried."

Lucille smiled.

"A Mormon! that is a man with a great many wives; he doesn't seem to want even one."

The girl's tone, her attitude, made Lady Macfarlane almost hysterical. She giggled. Then she went on:

"We heard of a Nubian slave, and a Turkish princess."

Lucille turned pale.

"Yes, and of a Turkish harem, no doubt."

Her tongue was acrid sweet, impossible to interpret, to Lady Macfarlane. There was something cynical in the girl's tone which alarmed her, and yet which seemed in keeping with the woman her brother had married.

Lucille rose from her seat. Of late, great emotions had swayed her.

"I know, too," she said almost savagely, "that he is one of the greatest men God ever made, and that I would rather have been his wife a week, than have married any other man."

Her passionate words awed Lady Macfarlane, and yet it did not seem strange to her that the woman her peculiar brother should have

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married, should speak like this. They had always been afraid that he would fall a prey to the adventuress.

"You don't know what a relief it is to us all, that he should have married you, dear."

The British matron is always hopelessly devoid of *savoir faire*. Lucille turned upon her with a smile.

"Yes, I think I can stand my heart being broken better than most women."

The bitterness of her tone, awakened something real in Lady Macfarlane's breast.

"We don't want your heart to be broken; that is why I came to-day, dear. Something must be done, and we are all on your side; we want to help you."

Lucille rose and stood in the middle of the room, and looked at Lady Macfarlane.

"Is it true," she asked, "that you want to befriend me?"

"Why, of course, dear! why else should I be here? We all want to befriend you; we want to help you. We are totally at sea, but we realise this—that Clifford has behaved abominably towards you. We are all going to stand by you."

Lucille laughed. It was the laugh of a child, yet it echoed in the room sardonically.

"Yes, I believe you, Lady Macfarlane. It

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is good of you to have come, because you are Clifford's sister. I am glad to see you. With no other woman would I have discussed him. I won't discuss him with my mother even."

"She lives with you, doesn't she?" put in Lady Macfarlane. This had seemed to her to put the seal of respectability on to Clifford's wife—that her mother lived with her.

"Yes, she lives with me," replied Lucille, coldly; "but, Lady Macfarlane——"

"Alice," her guest put in, tentatively.

"I do not know you, Lady Macfarlane, I cannot call you Alice—not just yet—but there is something you can do."

"What is it, what is it?"

The magnetism of this girl, hypnotised Alice Macfarlane. Something which had moved her brother, which coursed in his veins, coursed through hers too; something abnormal, nomadic, belonging to those who have inherited the spirit of vagabondage albeit they may have sold themselves into the light servitude of the commonplace.

"I want every one to know that he was quite right, that I approve of what he did, that he will come back; that he has gone, because his instincts, his genius, called him; he is not like other men. I want the world to *think*—no," she corrected herself, "I want

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the world to *know*, that I understand why he went, that I approve of all he does, that one day he will come back."

She spoke passionately, proudly, and her words took Lady Macfarlane's breath away. For days she had asked herself, merely in order that she should be able to look things squarely in the face, what she should have done if Macfarlane had behaved like this. She had come to no definite conclusion, but she realised that she would not have met his desertion in this spirit. Somehow she was vaguely conscious that his desertion would not have resembled that of her strange, nomadic brother.

"You mean——" she faltered.

"I mean"—Lucille spoke fiercely—"that no one is to pity me, that I know why he has gone, when he will come back; that I won't be pitied, that I won't have them blame him."

Lady Macfarlane was silent. With the roar of carriages, carrying to and fro their freights of inconsequents, beneath the window, the magnificence of this girl-woman awed her. Clifford had known what he was about when he chose this girl. To Lady Macfarlane, she seemed like a watch dog, left on the steps of his house, to guard it in his absence. The loyalty, the strength of this child awed her,

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the while something within her whispered, that only such a woman could her brother have married.

"You are quite right," she almost whispered. "We have grown too lax in England about the honour of our families; we will do as you wish, Lucille."

"It is not a question of honour." Lucille was pacing the floor now. All the arguments, all the philosophy, all the brain-threshing of months was upon her. "It is not a question of honour, Alice." She strove in the appellation to bring this woman within her sphere of thought. "He is not to be judged as other men. If I had been older, if I had understood, he would never have gone; if he had, I would have gone with him. The world, his world, your world, must understand that he has done nothing wrong, that he is," she broke into a laugh, "that he is just Clifford Yelverton; and if you want to be my friend, my sister, you must tell them that I understand that it is all right."

She laughed a little hysterically, and Lady Macfarlane whispered: "Dear, I understand."

"No, nobody understands," Lucille exclaimed, passionately; "but they must know that I understand, that I expect him back, that it is all right."

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She did not know, nor did Lady Macfarlane, that she was trying to save her childish pride, the pride of not having been able to keep him. Yet, when they parted, both were aware of an *entente cordiale*.

CHAPTER VII

SHE was not even quite certain herself, Lucille, of why she wished to guard his name so jealously, of why she wished the world never to know that he had simply run away from her. At first it had been from pride, hurt, wounded pride; then, as the years succeeded each other, when the world could not misdoubt the evidence of its senses, could not but realise that, whether he had intended to have done so or not, he certainly had not returned, in all probability was never going to return, she still continued to speak of him as if he had left the day before. As her friends increased, and some, by a closer intimacy, began to understand, the pathos of it inspired them with pity and love for her. Lady Macfarlane had been true to her word, had assisted her sister-in-law in keeping up the little comedy to the world; then, as the years went by and they had questioned her, she would say: "He must be dead, or he would have come back." Seven summers, seven winters came and went,

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and Lucille had increased in beauty, in sweetness—a sweetness which was enlarged by the sadness which lingered there. She went a little into Society, under the guidance of her sister-in-law, but she never danced. Since her husband's disappearance she had devoted herself to music, had taken to reading books of travel, of biography, of history, of new thought, and she was passionately fond of the theatre. She did not encourage the visits of men, and her relations with her mother had remained frigid. They saw very little of each other, except during August and September, when they visited some watering-place together, or travelled. Together they had been to Austria, Italy, France, Belgium. One winter they had spent at Cairo, Lucille prompted thereto by a wild hope that he might be there.

There were moments when the dreariness of her life overwhelmed her, when, alone in her room, she would give herself over to despair. But she never let a murmur escape her in public. Once a year regularly she called at the office of Messrs Greene and Hastings, and once a year regularly, the oldest member of the firm called upon her. At first they used to discuss him. She would ask if they had heard, and Mr Greene would shake

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his head, and tell her that none of the letters had been answered. Then, as the years progressed, they had talked less of him, more of business, of indifferent matters, and now and then, very rarely, when she required it for travelling, she would make some small incursion into the sums which were hers by right. The lawyer would consult her about investments, tell her of the golden numbers that were being added to golden numbers, and sometimes, at first, had suggested that, as her husband had never drawn on the portion of the money she had refused, that it was absurd that she should not take advantage of the large amounts lying idle. But she never swerved from her resolve. Her patience, her continuity of purpose, filled him with astonishment, and of late he had given up suggesting. Then one day the news had come of Griegsen's exploration, and its failure, and the several men who had been found dead, one of whom he fancied was Yelvertön. It had been with something of a plan to get her free, that Mr Greene had insisted that everything led him to this belief. The lonely life of this young woman saddened him.

"What proof have you?" she asked, and it seemed to him that the news had been a shock.

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After that she had allowed him to spend a certain portion of money in trying to find out ; but they met with no success. Then presently Lord Traverty had died, and Lucille had permitted the advertisements which, Mr Greene urged, were necessary to the winding-up of affairs. It was while these advertisements were appearing in almost every paper in the world, that a certain amount of excitement, nervous excitement, entered into Lucille's life for the first time since her husband had left her. If he did not make some sign now, he never would, she told herself. He would come now, or she would never hear of him again. Would he come? that was what she asked herself ; and if he came, would she see him? That idea was the one which caused her the most pain, the most anxiety. How awful, how awful it would be if he returned to England, or communicated from afar with his lawyers, and did not come to see her! Then, indeed, the farce would be played out ; her pride, the pride she had so harboured and sheltered, would be laid low. It seemed to her that nothing but death would wipe out the shame, if he returned to claim his title, and left her, the wife, unclaimed. But the advertisements led to no results. There were a few letters, desultory ones, from this

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person and that. One declared that he had met him here, one there, that he had been on his way hither or thither. A few hotel-keepers wrote that at such-and-such a date his name had been registered on hotel books ; but the dates were always either too uncertain, or too distant to be of use, and always it was impossible to fill in the missing links of his movements, the days and weeks, when, perhaps, he was sojourning in some Bedouin tent, or beneath the roof of some friendly monastery.

"You may be sure," Mr Greene had said, "that if he does not appear now, something serious has happened. He is not alive."

Now and then people addressed her as Lady Traverty ; but she refused to accept the designation. If he were dead before his uncle's death he had never been, never would be, Lord Traverty, she said to her sister-in-law, who admired her common-sense always, her freedom from snobbery, or avariciousness. But she did not tell even her sister-in-law, that she clung to the old name which he had given her, and which she would allow no one to take away.

It was after the too evident futility of the advertisements, and the extensive enquiries which Lucille had authorised the firm of

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solicitors to make, when they failed to bring any tidings a year after that, that Lucille began to feel her confidence, her courage, desert her. And it was at that time that she came across Mr George Pennant, the rising young Member of Parliament, who had been mentioned in the gossip column of the society paper.

He had been standing, with a friend, at the window of a club, when she had driven past in Lady Macfarlane's carriage.

"That's a pretty woman," he had exclaimed; "who is it, do you know?"

"Pretty, and as good as she is beautiful," the other man, who was a friend of Lady Macfarlane's, had replied; "a rare combination nowadays. She is Mrs Yelverton, the wife of the explorer, the man who disappeared about eight years ago."

"She didn't look from here as if she were more than a girl."

"She is quite young—was seventeen or eighteen when he disappeared," and he told his friend the story, so far as he knew it. "She still imagines that he will return, and refuses to flirt even, with anybody else—lives with her mother somewhere near Curzon Street."

Somehow the story interested him—the story

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of this young girl's waiting life, her fidelity, her patience, her reserve. A sudden wish to see her, to speak to such a woman, came over him.

"She doesn't go anywhere, does she? I don't remember seeing her anywhere?"

"Not much. She goes out a little with her sister-in-law. The family are devoted to her, I believe; and no wonder." Then, with a sudden inspiration: "By-the-by, Lady Macfarlane gives some function or other, to-morrow night. I'll get you an invitation, if you like."

Mr George Pennant accepted, with an alacrity he could hardly account for, and the next evening found him bowing over the hand of Mrs Clifford Yelverton, who was standing at the head of the stairs behind her sister-in-law.

It seemed to him that he had never seen such an attractive face. He took her down to supper, and Lucille found him an agreeable companion. It was when he asked permission to call, that the first note of hesitation entered.

"I am afraid that all this week I am very busy, Mr Pennant. I go in for all sorts of things, principally music, and this week I have two concerts and——"

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"You have no concerts on Sunday, have you?"

He spoke with a touch of amusement, a touch of masterliness, which reminded her of Clifford, and she laughed.

"Well no, I have no concert, but I often, generally, go to the country on Sunday. I have a friend who has the prettiest little home in the country, and we generally spend it together. The country is so lovely; one seems to lose it all in London. There is such a short time before it all comes to an end. Someday, I think I shall live in the country altogether."

A thought flashed across his brain, the ready thought of evil, of the man of the world, the London man. What did they do, these two, who did they see during these country flittings? And, as if in answer to his thoughts, Lucille went on:

"Of course, I suppose people would think us very stupid. My friend is not well off. She can't entertain at all, and on Sunday she lets her only servant go out, and we cook—at least we generally have cold things, but we lay our own table, and wait on each other. It is great fun. Then we sit all the afternoon in the garden, and eat fruit, and talk. Sometimes we go to evening church.

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There is such a lovely old church, and I don't know, somehow, after all the week of rush, and hurry, and amusement it is so restful. I was brought up in the country, in a little cottage in Kent, not an hour from London, and I suppose that that is why I am so fond of it."

Something wistful appeared in her eyes, a faraway look; the cottage itself, the thought of it even, always brought back the one romance of her life, when the tall, strange man had called her the princess of the honeycomb, and asked her to be his wife, to take care of him.

"I suppose no one is admitted into those sacred haunts," he said tentatively. A sudden fancy seized him to go out and visit these women. There was a pastoral sound in her description, something which reminded him of drowsy afternoons, of church bells, and green meadows, and rest. He, too, felt the strenuous life too much, but his Sundays were as strenuous as the week days. He could imagine that it would be very pleasant to spend a Sunday with these two women, especially with this one, who fascinated him already.

"Oh, sometimes some one calls, but very rarely." A funny idea seized Lucille. She would like to introduce this man to her friend,

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a young widow of her own age, a serious-minded woman, and a pretty one, who led a lonely, retired life, and had a hard struggle to make both ends meet. "If you like to come down next Sunday——" She spoke hesitatingly. She hoped he would not think that she wanted him to come. "Or any Sunday," she added.

"Next Sunday as ever is," he said, smiling. "You might change your mind, or your friend might say, 'not that man, I forbid him the house.'"

Lucille laughed.

"Oh, she won't say that. She is always glad to see my friends. Alice (Lady Macfarlane) came with me once, but we had to walk across the fields, and she had a Paquin gown on, and we had to get over a stile—you see, my friend has no carriage, we couldn't get a cab, it is such an out-of-the-way place—and she was carrying a red parasol, and we had to pass a field with a bull in it, and we were dreadfully afraid he would run at us." She laughed at the remembrance of Lady Macfarlane's visit. "I never could get her to go again."

Mr Pennant looked down, amused.

"I promise two things," he said with mock gravity. "I won't wear a Paquin gown, and

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won't carry a red parasol." His tone was that of an older man towards a child. Lucille had never quite lost that childish aspect which inspired people to pity and to pathos, which made one deal tenderly with her, approach her mind with measured, careful steps. He drew down his shirt cuff and wrote the address. "Then next Sunday," he said. "And you start——"

"Oh, I don't know at what time I shall go. You had better meet me there." The idea of travelling down with him—that had never occurred to her.

"Oh yes, you do. You know there is one train you always try to catch, and, of course, I dare not cross that field without you to protect me."

Lucille laughed. His breeziness was infectious.

"Oh, if I tell her that we are coming she will send a cab. There is one cab—a cab which takes every one, the only one. The horse looks a hundred years old, and when any one gives a party, which very rarely happens, they have to arrange to go in relays, so that the cab goes backwards and forwards half the evening."

"Are there still such places?"

He spoke musingly. The woman, the

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story of the remote corner, the one cab—how different it all sounded to what they were accustomed to, how utterly apart from to-night, for instance, with the wealth of exotic flowers, those flowers which look as if they had been given an artificial birth, in order that the humans should witness their stifled death-throes, their asphyxiation. The music, the music of the acrid-sweet kind, which is supposed to be necessary, and the men and women coming, going beneath the light, chatting, laughing, all playing the same absurd game, the while the heart and souls of half at least, of them, are travelling away across dark spaces, along the corridor of life, almost ignorant of the actions, the foolish puppet actions, of the bodies which encompass them.

And on Sunday he had been at Paddington to meet her, and they had travelled down together, and he had tried during the short space that they were alone together to gather something of her mind, the mind she kept hidden with such dignified reserve.

"Tell me, Mrs Yelverton, do you really enjoy this trip every Sunday, or do you pretend to?"

"Pretend to?" she raised her eyebrows, "why should I pretend to? What can it

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matter to any one whether I do or do not? Why, I love it. I look forward to it all the week."

Yes, he believed her.

"It is absurd for you to talk like that about its mattering; why, it just depends on you to make it matter. Of course, if you don't care a rap about society, that's different."

She smiled a little sad smile. This man inspired confidence.

"You see, I'm difficultly situated."

He was silent. To ask her what she meant, he felt would be an impertinence.

"Surely, after these years," he said, irrelevantly almost.

"Yes, I know, that's what everybody says, but——"

She broke off suddenly. This man—what right had he to discuss her affairs.

"Guess what I've got in that basket." She raised her eyes to the hamper in the rack above.

"A kitten?"

"No, I hate cats."

"Pigeons?"

"No, our supper."

"It makes me hungry to think of it. Are we to carry that across the fields beneath the very nose of that bull?"

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She laughed.

"Do you think I would ask you to do such a thing? Rita will send a cab."

When they reached the little station, and finally drove up to the gate of Mrs Lancaster's garden, Rita Lancaster, coming to meet them, said to herself: "What a splendid man. Just the very kind of man I should like Lucille to marry."

CHAPTER VIII

BUT nothing would have been further from Lucille's thoughts than marriage, or even a growing and more intimate acquaintance with this man, if it had not been that, just at the time she met him something of certainty that her husband was dead had not gradually, slowly, begun to pervade her mind. It could not be, she told herself, that he would not have even indirectly corresponded with his solicitors, when he came into his uncle's title and estates. It could not be that just because he had deserted her, he yet was never again going to let the world hear from him. The description of the man whose body had been found amongst those of the victims of the Greigsen expedition, tallied with that of her husband, and his continued silence seemed to point to the fact that he would never return. Yet, unless she were certain, Lucille would never permit herself to run the risk of marrying again. She was not even sure that she had any inclination to do so. Her one

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romance, her one moment of emotional interest, had come and gone ; and waiting patiently for some climax which instinctively, she felt would one day culminate, had become second nature to her. When Rita discussed the question with her she would say, with her little sad smile : " My dear, I have taken so many years growing accustomed to being unmarried, that I don't believe I should know how to set about it." How old she felt sometimes, as the years succeeded each other, bringing with them the fulness of experience which comes to all in some degree, and which, with her, had ripened fully, amply, abundantly, as corn in a rich loam, on account of the strangeness of her circumstances.

Old, and she still looked like a young girl, still possessed the girlish grace, the freshness, which had taken his fancy in the old days, when, after barbarous wanderings in uncivilised countries, the little cottage and the simple, flower - embowered life of Lucille and her mother, had seemed to him the most beautiful thing in the world,—a freshness, a youth, which came a great deal from the sanity of her mode of living, from a natural healthiness of mind, which had been her mainstay. Air, exercise, music, flowers—these were her recreations, the while her mind was set on improving itself.

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It was with something of weariness, that she tried to count the books she had read in these long years, the hundreds of books. When she allowed herself to think, she told herself that she had only been cheating herself, trying to pass the time, to glide more quickly along the intervening years between his departure and the day when they would meet again. And now, in the full consciousness of a ripe and beautiful womanhood, she told herself that if he came again she would understand, she would be able to keep him, unless he too had changed again.

And to-day, when George Pennant, who was something also of a personality, entered her life, she too began to doubt. A distant cousin had even come forward to claim the title and estates, and Mr Greene told her that he did not see on what grounds the claim could be contested. There could be no doubt that Clifford Yelverton was dead. . . The young wife's tenacity of belief that he still would return, he was beginning to consider almost an absurdity.

And Lucille began to ask herself whether, now that ten years had elapsed, she was to embark on another decade of loneliness, or to awaken to the claims of life, to listen again to words of love uttered in new tones, and to try

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to gather from the future some of the pleasure which her fidelity had cheated her out of.

And George Pennant was no laggard. The touch of reserve, the continual need to hold back, which was the reflection of her own withholding, added piquancy and zest to his wooing. It had become a habit now for him to go down on Sundays with her to her friend, and instinctively, without knowing that it was so, the whole week was influenced by the thought of those hours spent together, hours which the discretion of her friend, Mrs Lancaster, enabled them to spend, for the most part, alone. Then, one day, she had said to her friend :

"Rita, dear, I want to stop this Sunday affair, I want to have a quiet Sunday with you, just as we used to do ; things are going too far, and besides, the whole idea of these Sundays together was in order to have peace and rest. I never see you now at all. You must invent some excuse, or we must go away somewhere for a few Sundays. I want to break them off— I mean I want to break off seeing so much of Mr Pennant."

"My dear, you are ridiculous. Of course I know how you feel, but really, my dear, you cannot go on leading this lonely life for ever. Think, dear, of the years which probably still

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lie before you," Rita Lancaster had said ; then she had added : " And I do believe that he is really a good man as well as a clever one, and, yes, I believe, Lucille, that you really do like him, that you could care for him if you only would let yourself."

Lucille looked into her eyes and laughed. It was good, after all, to be loved, after all these years.

" Yes," she said, " I will make no secret of it, I am beginning to care for George Pennant ; he interests me very much, but I don't want to care. I am afraid of caring. I mustn't, you know ; it would be too awful."

Her friend looked at her fondly. Almost she was beginning to think that her lot was the happiest—the certainty of being a widow, of knowing that love had been hers, and had passed away leaving tender memories behind—and yet, to her, Lucille's fidelity seemed a little absurd, fidelity to a man who had deserted her, left her to face life alone ; who had never troubled to find out how it fared with her, if she were happy or unhappy, alive or dead.

Once more, for the hundredth time, they discussed Clifford Yelverton, the probabilities of his being dead or alive.

" After all," her friend had said to her, " even

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if he were alive, even if he returned, no one could blame you after all these years ; besides, your husband foresaw such a contingency arising."

And with something dreamy in her eyes, and the faraway look, which her friend now recognised as the look which meant that the past rose up—vivid, insisting, demanding dues of the future—Lucille had answered :

" You don't quite understand, Rita, dear—the trouble is this. I only like George Pennant because I am alone, sad sometimes, and without Clifford. If he were to return, if he would come back, I would leave George Pennant at once. I have no right to run the risk of making him unhappy."

Her love, her patience, her fidelity, filled her friend with wonder ; would it ever be rewarded ? She thought of women she knew who had their husbands with them, good, devoted husbands, who had children, and yet who were not satisfied, who were not faithful. She was glad that she had found a woman friend who possessed some of the higher virtues, the nobler graces. It made life seem more real, more full, more noble, less of a chaotic dream, wandering through unknown pastures. Yet she considered that Lucille was foolish to continue to believe that her husband was alive, or, at least,

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that he would ever return. Judging from what she had heard of Clifford Yelverton, she thought that it was quite likely that he had by this time married some Indian squaw, or African princess, and settled down to the life of a savage, ignoring title and position. That seemed the only explanation, if he were not dead. The idea that he was staying away on Lucille's account after the letter, the message she had sent him, and the advertisements she had inserted, was absurd, that is, if he had seen them; and if he were alive, it seemed unlikely that there was any corner of the world so absolutely isolated that some rumour of life in London should not reach him. Her prayer was that if he were dead, Lucille might have proof positive of it, before it was too late, before she had turned away George Pennant, before he, disillusioned, perhaps, or out of pique, fell into the toils of some other woman.

But the Sunday following their conversation, Lucille did not go to see her friend.

"He will go as usual," she said, "and you will explain to him, dear."

Rita did not like the task. She loyally explained all that Lucille had told her to explain, but she added a great deal out of her own mind.

He had arrived as usual on the Sunday, and

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had been disappointed in not finding Lucille. It was as if, for the first time, he realised the difference she had made in his life. He could hardly sometimes believe that it was he himself, the politician, alternatively grappling with the problems of party and power and the glory of empire, alternately a *flâneur* in the drawing-room of the prettiest and wittiest women in London, who could have become content with quiet Sundays in a country cottage, with cold suppers and a rigorous simplicity of detail and surrounding; not only content, but looking forward to them with excitement, with desire.

"I suppose that she has stayed away on purpose to avoid me?" He liked Mrs Lancaster, and felt that he could confide in her.

"Yes, and no," she said. "It is not, I am sure, that she does not like you, that she wishes to break with you as a friend, but, you know, she cannot get the idea out of her mind that her husband is alive, and will some day come back, and, of course, if that is the case, she is right."

"She must have been very fond of him." A sudden jealousy of Clifford Yelverton rose in his breast—the man who had spoiled her love for George Pennant, yet disregarded the

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love she had given him. Whenever George Pennant thought of Yelverton, he called him "that brute."

"Yes, I think that she was very fond of him. It is quite extraordinary ; she seems to think of him to-day, just exactly as he was ten years ago—fancy ten years, and she still looks such a child. His memory does not seem to have faded one whit. Sometimes I wonder if it is all love, or whether there is some pride mixed with it—if she has pretended to the world so long that she must now go on to the end."

"I wonder." George Pennant felt rather hopeless at Mrs Lancaster's words, and, more to buoy himself up with hope than from optimism, he asked: "But supposing that she ever hears that he is dead, do you think that then she will think of remarrying?"

"Yes, I think so," Mrs Lancaster responded brightly, "I think so ; I think she is dreadfully lonely at times, dreadfully dispirited and low, but she is so brave. Sometimes I wish he would turn up again—I think that he could not help loving her after her long constancy—and sometimes I really wish that he were dead, and that she knew it. The years are passing so quickly, and one day it will be too late."

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He looked away a little.

"I don't think it would ever be too late for me," he said musingly. He had fallen desperately in love with the young woman, and her seriousness, her aloofness, only added to the charm; something real and sincere and stable about her, responded to something strong in his own being. Who can really explain, define, the attributes which form a strong character, a character which has the personality of its strength, and inspires a feeling of restful confidence. Both of them possessed this.

"I am sorry that our Sundays have come to an end, they have been so delightful. Surely just this one afternoon in the week it could not have mattered. No one even knows."

Mrs Lancaster laughed lightly.

"Do you think that no one knows? Don't people know everything, find out everything, disfigure everything, lower everything to the vulgar plane of their own thoughts? Why, only the other day Lady Macfarlane began asking Lucille questions about you, saying that every one was talking about it, and was it true? And one or two people have been very ill-natured indeed about her meeting you here, saying that she pretended to be so

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demure and *Sainte n'y touche* in London, but that she was having a flirtation under the rose. Some one, I suppose, whom we none of us even know by sight, sees you both at the station every Sunday, and has gossiped. But of course, it is very annoying to Lucille, and so I agree with her that for a time she had better come alone, or not at all. I am going away in a week or two, so our dear little party would have been broken up anyway. Of course you can go and see her now in London," she added, then looking at him in her most persuasive, appealing way, she said: "Do you ever take advice—does anybody?"

"Every one takes it, but they don't make use of it," he said, laughing, "but I will do my best. Yes, I think, Mrs Lancaster, that I should be inclined to take your advice; you look as if you could give very good advice, and you have been very kind to me, and I believe that you have Mrs Yelverton's interests at heart. Why, it's monstrous that a girl of her age should be condemned to a life like that—it's preposterous—there ought to be a law."

"Why don't you bring one in, or try to?"

"I am afraid that the personal note might be detected." He laughed, and Mrs Lancaster smiled.

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"Well, my advice is this, do not compromise her in any way by too much attention,—be patient, and who knows! But she is so sensitive about the whole matter, that if she found out that a great deal was being said, she would give up seeing you. *Chi va piano, va sano*," she added, laughing, and he ended:

"*E chi va sano va lontano*."

They both laughed.

"Ah, dear Italy," she said, "somehow none of these things seem to matter anywhere else, so much as they do in England—in London."

"I had hoped——" He broke off. He had been a fool, he told himself, but he had hoped to persuade her to marry him at the end of the season, and take her abroad during the autumn recess. Now his dream vanished into thin air.

Seeing how crest-fallen he looked, Mrs Lancaster tried to cheer him up.

"After all, you know, the position would be a little complicated if he ever did come back."

"No one could blame her; I know I couldn't." He smiled a little grimly.

"No, I don't suppose you would." Mrs Lancaster laughed again, and for the first time he noticed what a pretty woman she was. Then in a graver voice: "But she

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would blame herself. She would never forgive herself, and sometimes, do you know that I wonder if she has some inner sort of revelation of the future, some second sight, something of the prophetess, of the seer."

"Oh, for heaven's sake don't suggest such a thing. Nobody wants him back, and if he ever did return, she would probably be more disappointed than any one else."

"I wonder."

It was with a heavy heart and a fit of the blues that he returned to London, telling himself that he had no luck.

And it was just that week, the week that she had a little broken away from George Pennant, the while she really was beginning to grow interested in him, just when she was beginning to realise that all attempts on the part of the solicitors to discover her husband, or even to elicit news of his previous movements, or of his death, had failed, that her mother fell ill and died.

Lucille nursed her with passionate solicitude, and it was with something akin to the old feelings which had existed between them, that they drew together again now, in the hour of parting, when the daughter began to understand why the mother had schemed, and the

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mother understood that she had ruined her daughter's life by her match-making.

"I did it for the best," Mrs Martin had whispered, "I did it for the best ; we were so poor, and I wanted you to have everything."

"And I have nothing," the young girl almost murmured, "at least, not the one thing I crave for."

Then the mother had grasped her wrist in her hand.

"Do you know, dear, that I have a feeling that he will return, that all will go well at last, and then you must think more kindly of me."

Now that her mother had gone, it seemed to Lucille that she had been hard, unkind ; that, given over to her own brooding, resentful at the part her mother had played, in trying to force her to accept the money when all her pride revolted against it, she had neglected to treat her mother with sufficient consideration.

It was on the night of the day her mother died, that telegrams were flashed all over the world nearly, flashed by Lucille Yelverton to her husband, containing the same message each time, conveying it to distant, outlying corners of the world. The message said :

"Come at once, I must see you.—LUCILLE."

CHAPTER IX

Yes, it seemed to Lucille that to-night she must get into touch with him, must see him, or die. The loneliness, the isolation, the solitariness of her life appalled her. To-night she felt that she needed his presence, and that in her trouble she had a right to demand it from the man who had sworn on the altar to worship her and cherish her. And all night she started at every sound and listened, wondering if he had received it, if he would come; but the long, silent night spent itself and died away into morning, and no message came. Lady Macfarlane and one or two of her husband's relations, Rita Lancaster, and all her best friends rallied round her, trying to comfort her, to console; but there was something stony in her grief, through which they could not pierce. Her mother's death had saddened her, but besides this there was a fierce hurt in her heart which seemed to burn, the hurt of being disregarded, unnoticed by the man she called husband. As

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the days went by, and after the funeral, she sat like one in a stupor, the consciousness that he was still alive rising, increasing rather than diminishing as the days and weeks and months went by, and for the first time aware that the solicitude, the loneliness, were more than she could bear, that presently she would be given over to chronic melancholy, if she didn't make an effort to overcome the constant thought of him, the constant remembrance. And as the days merged into weeks and no message came, something of revolt against him began to pierce. It was cruel, wicked of him to have deserted her; he deserved that she should care for some one else. In those days George Pennant gave evidence of his worth. He never annoyed her, never came too often nor stayed too long, yet found a hundred ways to serve her, to save her pain, to show his sympathy, doing all the little things, the tiny services for her, which a woman only realises have been tiresome, fatiguing, the day some one takes them off her hands. Yes, to-day she realised that she was very weary, that life had not been just nor the fates kind, and in her grief, her dreariness of spirit, her mind dwelt with something restful on the stability of his devotion.

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Henceforward she would have to **change** the tenour of her life. The flat, from which she missed the image of her mother, had grown distasteful to her, and she longed for some vitalistic change to come into her life. Sometimes her eyes would fall with wistful fondness on the groups of little children in the park, looking, in their white frocks, like perambulating daisies. Why had this solace been denied her? She realised daily that the duality of God's creation had held wisdom in it. It was not good for man to be alone, or woman either; the only real life was the fireside, the patriarchal life, the home, and it seemed to her that she had no home, that she had been travelling all her life in an ark, waiting for the waves of trouble to assuage, and watching for the dove bearing the olive branch, and that, as the days progressed, the sky grew heavier, and she lost the faint hope of seeing its outspreading wings against the horizon.

In those days she tried the patience of Rita Lancaster and George Pennant. There was something that savoured of obstinacy in her refusal to give up hope, now, in the ninth year of her desertion.

"You simply *won't* be happy," her friend told her. "After all, my dear, if he is alive

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and doesn't choose to come back, who could blame you? Surely, when he saw the announcement of your marriage, he would keep his promise and stay away for good; and besides, he must be dead—he must.”

And Lucille did not tell her that just what she was most afraid of was, lest, when he saw the announcement, he would stay away.

And there was something else that she didn't tell her friends, conscious that they would not understand: the perfection of George Pennant did not appeal to her as the imperfections of Clifford Yelverton did. When he had been with her, she had cried because he took no interest in her clothes, in her thoughts, in the interests of her day of small things; George Pennant was of the school of men who realises that a man must be always a lover, put himself aside entirely for the woman he wants to win, and continue to put himself aside. He disagreed with the American who said, that when' you wanted to stop a car you ran after it; that 'when it had stopped, there was no need to run. Always he would have devoted himself to Lucille. He was of the men who enjoy domesticity, who revel in their children, who love their home, are proud of their wives,

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who would be ambitious for their sakes, who, while anxious to make a name, to serve his country, yet would always put his loved ones first. And now she realised that his very sanity would pall, that what had charmed, while it disturbed her, had been the unusual, in Clifford Yelverton, the erratic, the uncertain, the constant surprises alike of his tenderness and his callousness, while something within whispered that it was for her sake that he stayed away, and that if she could reach him she could draw him back, and, by her renewed patience, make him content.

"You must come to some decision," Rita had told her. "You are just wasting your life."

"Yes, you are right; I must make some resolve, some effort."

And the days succeeded each other, and she had not yet made up her mind. The oldest member of the firm was growing frailer now, more bent, but still he came and saw her. The heir, who called himself Lord Traverty, had called upon her with his young wife. Lucille had behaved very well, very generously. Her methodical common-sense, had dictated to her that if her husband were dead she had no right to oppose their claims, and what proof, after all, had she that he was not? She had

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been generous, had allowed much of the untouched money to be used to pay off the debts of the impecunious young man, who had never imagined that he would come into the title. She had relinquished the income she derived from the rental of the town house, and Merle's Nest. She was going to leave her flat, she told Mr Greene, and she would require still less than before. That she intended at last, to look upon her husband as dead, was the firm conviction of the solicitor. He hoped that the rumours he had heard were true, that she was at last going to marry again. He was not surprised that Mr Pennant should have fallen in love with the sweet, graceful, serious woman who possessed so much charm, and sometimes Rita, too, fancied that she cared for Mr Pennant, that, from her long passivity, she would arise suddenly, with a formed determination, from which she would not recoil again.

But marriage was not in Lucille's thoughts ; gradually, slowly, a plan formed in her mind, the only one which she knew would fill her life, absorb her. She would work for her living. She had lingered too long in the paths of indecision and of sluggishness. She was leading a useless life, while a hundred absorbing usefulnesses unfolded themselves

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daily. How many professions were open to women in these days. At one moment she decided to be a sick-nurse, at another to give music lessons. Privations, hard work, to come in touch with the brave workers, the human ants, that was what her spirit needed. She would disappear from the world, she told herself; but she was careful to take no one into her confidence, while she was unaware that what fascinated Clifford, the idea of disappearing, of taking the number and dropping the name, appealed to her, fascinated her. To-day, if he had been here, and suggested to her to go to the ends of the earth, she could have done it. To-day, she had reached the haven of thought she had been seeking. She understood how dissatisfied he must be with the puny efforts of Society, in its vain struggle to go one better than its neighbour, to compete in sensation, all that is left to it of zest, of energy. Yes, she realised to-day, that he had despised the luxury of wealth, not because he didn't care for things beautiful and artistic, not because he was not attracted by the finer things of life, but because he realised that wealth could produce charm artificially, that the veriest lout, with a few millions, can surround himself with the most beautiful

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pictures, possess himself of the best racing horses, purchase prize-winning cattle, the largest yacht, the private train, the most superb bronzes, and ivories, and tapestries, and wrought jewels of the world. The rich man who fails to do this, is the lower type of animal, far beneath dogs and horses, and has no right to call himself human at all, for, to disguise his *parvenu* appearance, his snobbishness, his want of cultivation, it is his duty to provide attractions for those he wishes to associate with. But of real sensation, the feeling that one is in touch with Nature, attuned to the key of life, to how many is this given? The vastness of Clifford Yelverton, that to-day fascinated, charmed her, the man who, while knowing everything that art and science, and even theory or experiment, could produce, had chosen the secret paths which God has provided for those who hate the high roads of life.

Only one thing could save her from melancholia, from despair; only one thing could arraign her life's efforts, alongside his knowledge of life, of its hard struggles and its restful joys. Something within her, longed to wrestle and attain; and with her husband's money, however little of it she used, she could never be really in touch with the fulness of

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sensation she craved for, the fulness which she had attained to by travail of soul, by loneliness, and much thought, and which, with him had been as a gift from the gods, a mantle thrown upon him which had fitted without being tried on, without having to be altered, the while hers had gradually grown closer to her, been fitted and fitted again, altered beyond recognition, till at last it shaped itself according to her ideals, her dreams. Ah, if he returned now, how different everything would be: the vagabondage of life which she had mused over, how it had begun to obsess her, the vagabondage of the world, which is the attribute of the real aristocrat of life, who claims not a tiny corner of the world, who will not crouch on a tiny hearth, but who demands the universe as his playing-ground.

She was slowly maturing her desires, forming them into a project, but it would not be fair to tell her plans; if she did, they would talk her out of them, Lady Macfarlane and George Penriant and Rita, they would persuade her that the beaten track was the only one that suited her, the while she longed for side-tracks and the silence of immensity, the oblivion of self which reaps a harvest of great memories, of huge emotions.

She had let her flat, and all her pretty

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things were stowed away, and George Pennant's heart was sore. She was going to disappear; he felt certain of it. He had a vague suspicion that she was going to set out in search of her husband, but this, she assured him, was not the case.

"Where should I find him?" she asked, with a touch of wistfulness. "I might go all over the world and pass him by where he lay hidden in some little God-forsaken nook, and he may be——" She broke off, her lips refused to shape the words which set the seal of the tomb upon his disappearance. Often and often, she would lie awake and wonder, whether he lay in a nameless grave, or whether he lived, and moved, and spoke, and thought, whether he ever thought of *her*. Sometimes a fierce jealousy would seize her, the dread of whether some other woman, older than she had been, more fit to be the companion of his strange, erratic spirit, which yet seemed to have a method and measure of its own, which resembled the mechanism of the firmament, the unexplained decree which binds the tides, and makes the earth hang in space, had succeeded where she had failed. The idea was unbearable. She remembered that, without thinking of the pain he brought, he had told her of Arabian slaves who had

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charmed him, of Nubians, of strange, untutored beings, fearless and untamed as the Walkküre, whom he had met on his different voyages. Once he told her of a fair maiden, far up North on a still unnamed island, who had wound her long tresses around his feet one night that he was cold. He had told her this, along with his other experiences, callously touching for an instant, with tender remembrance, on the act of the girl, which yet had left no lasting impression. But she remembered that the idea had been torture, for young as she had been, she had no idea of the lives of men. .

Now to-day, she felt that she could even bear to laugh with him at the devotion of the half-wild creature, and yet, what if he had met the one woman. Was that why he kept silence in the face of all the search, in the face of all the telegrams, the telegrams which had been sent from every post-office in London, to every place where he was supposed to have reached? One, she had been told, had gone nearer to the North Pole than any other; it had been flashed by wireless telegraphy. His silence, how it tortured her, this silence of the grave, the while some inner perception told her, that somewhere he was speaking, that if she knew where to reach

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him, she could hear his voice. Once in the night she had been called up on the telephone, and told that some one wished to speak to her through Paris, that the telephone message had come from afar, that they were trying to make connection, and would call her up again in two or three hours, and she had sat and waited, with white face and awestruck eyes, as if prepared to hear a message from the dead, the while she pressed her hands to her heart and told herself that if he spoke she could not bear it, it would kill her.

And they had never been able to connect the message. In vain she had telephoned to Paris and urged that the message should be traced up. It had been impossible: the person, whoever it was, had gone, regretted the impulse which had prompted the call, or been unable to make the connection, or left, imagining that she had not responded. For days after this she had been miserable, and the obsessing idea had again arisen in full force, the belief that he was alive and had tried to speak to her, called upon her in some distress. Who could tell the experiences he was going through. Yet if he were alive, what possessed him not to write, not to telegraph, not to come and claim his property? It could not be for her sake, seeing the

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message she had sent him repudiating the money and her liberty.

But the incident left a disagreeable impression, and one which survived former fancies, and widened the breach between her and George Pennant, the while she was conscious that in putting him away she was throwing aside one of the best chances of happiness a woman ever had. How could she explain, even to herself, that the very well-being he seemed to exhale, the good looks, the well-groomed appearance, the intelligence, the bright disposition, the ever-increasing notoriety, the successes, the ample means were too complete to appeal to her, that something unusual, half-tutored, something which reminded her of the gods of mythology, was what fascinated her in the personality of Clifford Yelverton. Sometimes, she caught herself wishing that George Pennant had been her first love, that she had met him first, and never known Clifford. To have known *him* seemed to her to make every other person impossible.

Everything was packed now, and the dismantled rooms which had been so pretty, with the virginal aspect which Lucille always somehow conveyed where she abided, were denuded and desolate, and on this, her last

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evening, she had invited George Pennant to dinner. It would be an uncomfortable one, she warned him; remind him of their plebeian Sundays, Rita had told him, but he had grasped at the chance of seeing her once more, with an utter disregard of surrounding which appealed to the two women. He had tried to get them to dine at an hotel with him, but Lucille had pleaded fatigue, and that her smart gowns were packed. In reality, she knew that here, in her own rooms, she would have the opportunity to speak a few words alone with him; Rita, dear friendly Rita, who was being so harshly tested, would disappear, and it seemed to him that she owed him this, that they should understand each other.

"Where are you going?" he asked her, when they were alone, "where are you going? You speak of loneliness, of solitude, and yet, when two people are ready to devote their lives to you, you run away from them. It isn't fair, Lucille, it isn't fair, you owe something to your friends, to those who care for you, and you do know that I care." His voice broke a little.

"Yes, I know that you care," she said, looking at him frankly, "and I care, too, that is why I am going away. You do not realise what it would be if I let myself care, and he

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came back ; to go through the marriage service with you, feeling as I do that he is alive, what a farce, what a crime that would be, and yet anything else——”

She did not finish her phrase, she, he, they both knew that anything else was impossible, that while the world might not censure, their own criticism of their own self-respect would mean the end of their respect for each other.

He felt very hopeless ; then, taking her two hands in his, as he sat beside her, he said : “ But if ever you knew for certain that he had died, what then, Lucille ? ”

“ Then,” she said, disengaging one hand and laying it lightly on his arm, “ then I promise that it shall be no one but you.”

“ It is worth waiting for,” he said, as he took her hand and kissed it. Then he leaned forward and tried to clasp her to him, to kiss her. “ Just once,” he said, “ to say good-bye, to remember.” But she drew back.

“ Not yet, not yet,” she said nervously, and as she half-murmured the words, gently, fearing to give pain, to seem hard, it seemed to her that she saw the vision of Clifford Yelverton, standing weary and travel-stained on a mountain peak, watching the rising sun, his hat in his hand, his thick locks fluttering on the early morning breeze, and that on his

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face the pink glow of the sun threw a ruddy glory, which gave him the air of a mountain god, scanning the sky for news of the coming day, for a message from the Nature with which he had linked his life, with a weird freemasonry which bewitched her.

CHAPTER X

AND to Clifford, too, had come a change of feeling. The liberty, the freedom, the vagabondage—what was the matter with him that they had ceased to please? The tent of the Bedouin, the wooden hut of the charcoal-burner in the forest, all these had been the haunts which had charmed him. Now, to-day, he hungered for his own homestead, for the pastures his eyes had dwelt upon as a child, for the tradition-soaked walls of the home of his ancestors. Clifford Yelverton, Earl of Traverty, Baron Kilmorne of Kilmorne—who was he? The man he had heard of since he was a child, whose name had been familiar ever since he was born. For ten years now he had wandered. Never before had he been so long away. Now this act of his own prevented his ever being able to do anything but wander. He had been, it seemed to him, all over the globe, and now and then there had been returns to civilisation, when he had

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bought new clothes and mingled with people of his own world, in Rome and Paris and Vienna, and here and there made a few new acquaintances; generally that of men, and men of letters or professors of science, or belonging to that vast herd of scientists who profess nothing and desire no honour, and yet who know everything, or seem to stumble on discoveries of the gigantic order, as other men stumble over a pebble. Here and there, he had made the acquaintance of some woman, and he had been conscious of a dual feeling, a wish to avoid the species, and a new note of interest. He seemed to know a great deal more about women now, he told himself, yet the knowledge didn't add much to his appreciation of them. Once he had met a charming widow, who had taken him seriously, ignoring his eccentricities, wedded to her grief, perhaps hardly cognisant of them, and, sitting on a verandah overlooking the Mediterranean, she had confided to him a little of the sorrow of her bereavement.

"I wonder if you men know," she had said, "how we miss you when you go—the way our thoughts follow you even in death?"

Her words, uttered in the darkness, while far away a mandoline tinkled its accompaniment to the low throbbing sounds of a boat-

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man singing, had filled him with vague distress. The message she had sent him—why had he not answered it? Was she still waiting, mourning, grieving? Oh no, he thought of Lucille, of her little demure, practical ways. She was not of the kind which grieves long, and he had not made her happy.

But after he read the rumours of the engagement, he departed from the high-road of civilisation. Here, at any moment, he might meet an acquaintance from amongst his varied circle, and such an event would have been fatal, have brought around him all the confusion of scandal, and business, trouble and arrangement, which his soul abhorred. Hitherto he had not cared where his footsteps led him. To-day he was in the desert, or wandering up the Nile in a dahabieh, stealthily gliding along the shore like a monster of the night; to-morrow he was attending some brilliant function, a Khedivial ball or a Maharajah's dusserah—it was all one to him—but now he would have, like a criminal, to think before he moved, to choose the outer circle where he would not be known. He could not even write to his own sister. The idea was awful, and growing, developing day by day, obsessed

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him. An exile! what horror in the word. And gradually, as the days and weeks went by, he told himself that if she had not married another, he would have gone back to her; anything rather than this self-ostracism which was worse than death. Now and then an impulse seized him to communicate with his solicitors, to find out what was going on. With a feverishness he had never yet displayed, he purchased English newspapers wherever he could; then, under an assumed name, he had ordered them to be sent regularly. They seemed to be a comfort, to keep him in touch with the world; he had always despised the papers, now he blessed them—which goes to prove how circumstances can alter cases. Gradually he was beginning to realise that everything has its good, its reason, and that to understand everything is to have experienced everything; to feel everything, to feel pity and sympathy, is to have suffered everything. His thoughts wandered in an extensive, weird philosophy. Was it possible that everything, even murder and crime, were right, or might seem right, under given circumstances.

Gradually, he came to wonder whether it would ever have been possible for him to enjoy married life, if he had thought of it?

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Had he been in too great a hurry to repudiate it?

And the perusal of these newspapers filled him with grim humour, the while he realised that as each new phase developed, it became more and more impossible that he should return.

One paper gave an account of the new Lord Traverty taking his seat in the House of Lords—the House of Lords which he had scoffed at as the doll's house of politics, in which great men played at being rulers. One Society paper rattled on, with the familiarity with which newspaper outsiders, talk of the intimate life of the great, about the generosity of Mrs Yelverton.

“The Travertys are very pleased with the behaviour of the wife of the missing Earl, who was deserted under such peculiar circumstances some years ago. She has always steadily refused to accept anything but a small stipend from her husband's estate, and has lived very quietly and unostentatiously; but she is evidently convinced now, that her husband is no longer living, and has given timely aid to the present peer, and as Merle's Nest and the town mansion were sadly in want of repair and need quite a little fortune to keep up, Mrs Yelverton has sanctioned her husband's solicitors

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making over the bulk of the fortune to the present Earl. The Earl is making vast improvements in the estate, and the old bowling alley, which was one of the features of the property, is being done away with in order to make room for new stables. The young man when in India, developed a great enthusiasm for racing and polo, a taste which he is now somewhat unexpectedly able to gratify."

An oath rolled from beneath Clifford's moustache and something of anger rose within. He had made over his fortune to her, keeping only a few hundreds for himself, it is true, but that was in order that she should not suffer from his desertion, but she had no right to put it into other things. What was Greene thinking about?

Once more the impulse seized him to make himself known. They still talked of her as Mrs Yelverton, then she was not married. Once more there pierced the longing, the fierce longing which was almost a hunger-pang, to go home, to face the music, to reveal himself. With a lurking sense of humour he tried to picture the upheaval his return would cause to a quantity of people; with something of maliciousness he tried to fancy the expression of his wife, his friends, the young Member of Parliament, the solicitors, the heir, if

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he walked into the room. Then his thoughts fell again to Lucille. Why had she refused his money? It had seemed to him that it was all she and her mother had wanted. And the words of the broken-hearted widow returned to him :

"I wonder if you realise how we women miss you when you are away."

There was something unexpected in this attitude of hers, which gave him food for thought, but all day something rankled above everything else, and that was the fact of the old bowling alley being destroyed. He remembered it as a child when he had visited his uncle.

"Damned impertinence," he muttered once or twice, while a silent rage possessed him at his impotence, at his powerlessness to interfere, the while something patriarchal, feudal, seemed to re-awaken in him. The next moment he asked himself why, after all, the young man should not come into the title and property now, since he had no children, would never have any. The roaming spirit was over, and to-day he sat and counted the cost in a little village on the top of a Pyrenean mountain, a tiny village, within three miles of a fashionable summer resort, where he dared not show himself

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lest people should dare assume that he was alive.

"I'm dead, dead," he said to himself, smiling, once or twice.

"Dead, but not dead and gone; I may turn up again."

The idea tickled his fancy. Why, after all, should he not return? The idea of the death in life was on account of her marriage, but he had seen that announcement a year ago and the papers still spoke of her as Mrs Yelverton. Was it possible that she was still waiting? The idea bored him. He wondered once if he would know her again. •

Then one day an incident had taken place which once more put him in touch with the world. The incident led to the following letter from Rita to Lucille, written three miles from the little village where Clifford was in hiding, living in the house of a peasant family and taking his meals with them.

"My dear," she wrote, "every time I write to you I swear that I will never write to you again, but something so strange has happened that I feel that I must write to you. We are still, the Danfords and myself, at the Eaux Chaudes; George Pennant is also still with us. I believe he just hangs on from sentiment, because he can talk to me of you.

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Yesterday we all went for an expedition to see the view three miles from here. We had been told that there was an inn, but there was nothing to eat there, so we sat down to rest while Mr Pennant and Mr Danford went to look for food. Oh, my dear, we were so hungry. I told them that if they only would find the food I would cook it. I can cook, can't I? And Mr Pennant grew quite excited at the idea; of course, my dear, it reminded him of our Sundays. Oh, how often I wish—but I must get on. Well, they came back and told us that there was a little peasant's house which looked clean, and where they would give us a 'garbure' (I am going to get the recipe, it is so good) and some cheese—enormous cheeses they are, looking like cart-wheels.

"And we all went in; and as we did so a man, unmistakeably an Englishman, and so good-looking, slouched away out of the back door. He was quite well-dressed, and, my dear, exactly like the picture you have of your husband, the one you had taken from the picture, and now here is the funny thing.

"Mr Danford, who had been to the back to see that the horses were properly attended to, came in by the back door of the little kitchen where we all dined, and as he passed the man, we heard him say: 'Hulloa, Yelverton!'

"My dear, my heart nearly stopped beating,

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and Mrs Danford thought I was going to faint. I already saw myself tearing back to telegraph to you; I had the telegram all written in my mind: 'Found him; come at once;' but, my dear, I do hope that I haven't raised your hopes, for it is a mistake.

"'You make a mistake, I think,' he said, raising his hat. 'My name isn't Yelverton.'

"Mr Danford, who used to know your husband years ago—travelled for months with him in Albania—says that he never saw such a remarkable likeness; he says he even walked like him, only, of course, he says that he looks older, and that his hair is now a little grey; and talking about his hair, there is another funny thing: as he took off his hat the sun caught a red strand of hair on his forehead. Do you remember telling me that what you remembered most vividly about him, what would make you recognise him at once anywhere, was that red strand of hair, which, you said, you thought made the link between himself and sunsets?

"Well, dear, I was so excited—I was wondering whether he was pretending or not, and, of course, his name isn't Yelverton now—I rushed out to speak to him; I was going to say: 'Mr Yelverton, what is the use of pretending that you are somebody else when we are all waiting for you?' but he had disappeared. We questioned the woman about him, but she could tell us nothing

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except that it was an 'Anglais,' and that he was a little—she touched her forehead; that he did nothing but walk to the top of the mountain, and take his hat off and stare around. Now, dear, doesn't that sound rather like him? She said—the woman—that he was 'Monsieur Smit,' but, of course, 'Smith' means nothing; as Mr Danford says: 'Every man has been "Smith" at some time or another in his life.'

"Well, dear, I am going back to-morrow. For your dear sake what would I not do, although you don't deserve it for leaving us all in the dark about your movements, and writing so rarely, as it were from the moon, without any address; but I am going, and if I can find him I will keep him, I assure you. Do you think, dear, that it can be he? I will let you know what I find out to-morrow; but don't, dear, for heaven's sake, begin to dream, for we may all be wrong, and he may be right. When he says that he is not Mr Yelverton; he may be speaking the truth."

- This letter Rita dispatched the same evening to the address Lucille had given for her letters to be sent to. Before she sealed it up Rita Lancaster added a postscript:

"I can't tell you how disturbed Mr Pennant is; he has been sitting here for nearly an hour

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talking it over. He says that if he had thought it was he, he would have horsewhipped him. They must never meet."

The next day Mrs Lancaster drove over to the village early in the morning, but Clifford had left that morning, they said, leaving no address.

On her return she telegraphed to Lucille :

"Drove there this morning, but he was gone."

But it was many months before Lucille received either the letter or the telegram. When she did, a crowd of events had entered her life, making it a bewildering chaos of confusion. Her silence filled Rita with dismay, and she enlisted the services of Mr Pennant to aid her in a search for Lucille on their return to England. As he said, he didn't like the job of bringing them together. If it were really Yelverton he thought he ought to be shot; but Rita persuaded him that now was the time to show his devotion. But the disappearance of Lucille irritated them both. She seemed to have taken a leaf out of her husband's book, and, for the moment, it was as if the couple had been wiped off the face of the earth.

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"The next surprise will be," George Pennant said grimly, "that we will find them living together in some out-of-the-way place."

Rita laughed merrily.

"And bored to death," she added, "when we turn up to interrupt the new honeymoon."

CHAPTER XI

CLIFFORD YELVERTON had yielded to an impulse, when he had denied that he was himself, had sheltered his veracity beneath his new title, and as he slipped away out of the little garden at the back of the house he laughed the short, grim laugh which was cynical without being bitter, and which always conveyed the impression that he saw through life without owing it a grudge; then he had realised suddenly with a pang that as it had been to-day so it would always be. He would have to tell lies, to whom truth was not only natural, but to whom so far it had seemed the only possible thing. Danford had been an old friend, and it seemed to him impossible that an old friend should not have been certain that it was he, should not have insisted on recognition. What if he had been certain, what if he returned to London to say that he had seen Yelverton and knew that it was he, what then?

Somehow the idea pleased him, the feeling

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of certainty that in the future, there would be a cataclysm which would clear the air. He had been so accustomed to Nature's vagaries—to the way storm succeeded sunshine and sunshine succeeded storm, to the quick devastations and the quick renewals of spring, to the daisy dashed groundward by the storm, which yet erected its head again the next morning—that he neither feared the thunderbolt of fate nor invoked it. As it was with Nature, so it would be with him, life would reassert itself and jog on again, only it was horrid to have to avoid one's friends as if one had committed a crime. It seemed to him now for the first time that he had committed a crime, a crime against society, the society which he had always despised, but which to-day seemed to him the only thing worth living for. The two well-dressed women, the old friend—all this had revived the desire which had lately obsessed him, to grow normal, to be like other men—the reaction from the vagabondage which had spread over too many years. He had had a surfeit of liberty. To-day he told himself that a prison would be preferable, an intermittent phrase exchanged with the gaoler, a relief. There had been one instant's pause when he had been on the point of returning Danford's greeting; and

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allowing the deluge to follow. The confusion of the deluge would be a vent for his pent-up feelings of restraint, the restraint which he had imposed upon himself when in another mood. Now his mood was that of the recalcitrant, the man who insisted on living, even if doing so is objected to by other men. What had caused his denial, had been more the habit of years, which had become an instinctive denial of his existence. Had he met a man who owed him fifty thousand pounds, and whom he had been searching for for years, or a thief who had stolen his watch, he yet would have denied that he was Clifford Yelverton. There was also the unconscious consciousness, that he must have time to think things out, not to be taken unawares till he knew for certain what had become of Lucille. If Lucille was married he would have to remain silent to the end, even, he told himself, to be content with no epitaph on his grave, no record of where he was buried; the idea was gruesome, extremely gruesome. He realised that he had never thought so much about himself as lately; with a species of scorn of the fact, he realised, that he had never been so human as he was to-day, that all his theories had been blown to the wind, that he was bored to death with his

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own society, and that, of the restricted circle which his circumstances had drawn around him. Now past his fortieth year, he realised that he was younger than he had ever been as a boy. He was taken once, with a sudden longing to go to a pantomime. Once the thought swept across his brain, that he had got nothing out of life in the way of sensation, that he had only seen a great deal, witnessed the emotions of Nature without being party to them. The brief interlude of married life, had made no more impression, than if she and he were billiard balls, rolling inconsequently across the green cloth, and perchance cannoning each other. The vital things of life, of these he knew nothing. He had always told himself that there were no vital things, that the humans made much too much fuss over deaths and births and weddings and partings, that sentiment was a hysterical growth which must be weeded out. He had even a theory that America was so great, because she wouldn't fertilise the weed of sentimentality, that the want of stamina of the south of America, was the result of the weed of sentiment being allowed to grow. Lately it had made his heart ache, filled him with jealousy, to witness the domestic happiness of the French peasants with whom he had taken

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up his abode. Of course family life was absurd, ridiculous, but since it seemed to so completely satisfy the human, was it not after all meant, that man was to seize, grasp at the minor things which came across his path and make the most of them. Yet in the morning, after the incident had occurred, he told himself that he must go. There was no telling what Danford might do. He was capable of coming back to find out if he had been mistaken or not. That would never do, never, till he had made up his mind. It was a bore to leave this little place, but Europe was so uncomfortably small, especially when one was a man of some position. There was no freedom at all. He must go to some other quarter of the globe, or he must go to London as some other man. He remembered that his solicitors had once told him that the only place to satisfactorily lose oneself in, was London, that they had had clients who had migrated from one side of London to the other and never been molested.

The idea of where he would have to live, in order to achieve that, was repulsive, and evoked the picture of a row of villas all on the same pattern. He had something of the despair of a nesting bird, who realises that boys are supernatural beings who can

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climb trees, which seem to touch the sky, that there is no escaping them. At the next place he stopped at, he caught himself wondering, whether if she were not married it would even be better to seek Lucille. Yes, it seemed to him that even the hated married life, was better than this death in life. He even began to wonder whether, if he returned, she would let him go back to her. Suddenly, he realised that he had become a beggar, thankful for crumbs, that he, who had never appealed, was ready to grovel. Then he had laughed at the humour of the thing, the way life had dealt with him as it did with all humans, exacting its due for liberty, pricing it higher (the God-given gift) than anything else.

The thought of Lucille brought back the memory of the message she had sent him. As if clearness of vision had come to him, belated, but more insistent in its endeavour to make up for its tardiness, he began to ask himself if she were still waiting, if it was possible that she had meant the message seriously. If she did, how she must have suffered. But no, he was certain that she had not suffered, or there would have been the one crucial moment, when she would have sent him the message to come. He

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wondered now whether, if she had sent it, he would have gone. The idea that he might have refused shocked him. For the first time he felt the horror of loneliness, the wish to confide in some one, the longing for a friend with whom to exchange thoughts, of whom to ask advice. It was intolerable to think that he could not even write to his own lawyers, without pulling the world down about his ears, so it seemed to him. Travelling about from place to place, more than once, the idea of suicide entered his mind—suicide, an end of a life, in which he had accomplished nothing, not even the duties which the most insignificant peasant yet accepts as the trust of life, to have children, to make a home. It seemed to him suddenly, that while watching the methods of Nature, he yet had not learned the humblest lesson from it. He had watched the pageant, like a country rustic without realising that he formed a part in the panorama of life. The sameness of his life, how dreary it had become: that horrible sameness, the want of interest others felt in his coming and going, how it palled—palled, when once his only wish had been to be where no one knew him, no one cared.

He remembered with a species of wonder how he had hated people who asked him

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questions as to where he was going. He had loved to start off by night trains, at unpremeditated moments, not to know where he was going; to take tickets for some little out-of-the-way place, and then to go on again if the place did not suit him; to linger weeks in some place where chance had made him halt. To-day the vastness of his liberty appalled him. If he died suddenly, no one would know, no one would care, and yet to end life because he had obtained that liberty, how grotesque it would be, and filtering through his mind all the time, running like the little course of a tiny stream alongside a great river, small poetic perceptions of life, of women, of love, of beauty, of art, having nothing in common with himself, but theoretic, idealistic, telling of ethical intercourse which would charm away the days and hours. And for many days he hovered between decisions, decisions which seemed either to rise on each side like insurmountable mountains, or to scoop like ravines, into the depths of which he dared not look, which gave him vertigo. He was wholly at sea with his mind, he told himself, had lost his bearings as a vagabond, and yet failed to attune himself to the methods of ordinary mortals. Once he decided to communicate with his

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solicitors privately, enjoining silence. Then he realised, that this course would be impossible, that to do so would be to make them party to a course of deception which they would repudiate. Who could tell? Perhaps at this hour they had even ceased to be friends, ceased to take any interest in him. Perhaps they would no longer help him to reassert himself. The years had passed without his noticing them, now suddenly he felt a hundred years old, a "Rip Van Winkle."

Then slowly there filtered to his mind a plan which it took him many days to mature. He would change his name and return to the world, a new man outwardly, as he was a new man inwardly.

He would, so to speak, test himself first, while he travelled about, get accustomed to his new personality, and when he was sure of himself—had, so to speak, introduced his new self to his old self and become acquainted—he would go back to England and find out for himself what was going on. He was fully aware that the idea which prompted him was to seek out Lucille, and if she forgave, to return to the prosaic path of domestic infelicity, if such a path led him to find himself again. He laughed at the new problem of a man seeking to become himself again. Presently

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he became aware that he looked upon the other man, Clifford Yelverton, the traveller, as he would upon a man he had met. The new man, Lord Traverty, was beginning to interest him more, and the haunting shadow of himself he wished to get rid of. Mentally he was committing murder, every time the old Clifford Yelverton crossed his path. Now and then he would laugh grimly at the way life had insisted on his returning to take up its responsibilities. It just showed the limitations of the mind : how it revolved in endless circles, enlarging its eddies, perhaps, but not permitted to disappear on the vast expanse of experience, or to be submerged. And underlying the resolves which chased each other in his mind, a growing excitement at the race with his other self, which his own act had instituted. Of remorse, repentance, he felt nothing as yet. He was conscious that in the mood in which he had left her, it would have been impossible for him to remain. Her feelings—those he had never considered, because he had never fully realised that she had any. Had he bought a tropical bird whose plumage pleased him, and whose presence in a cage had only given him the feeling of a living presence, he could not have been more callous. Even now, there

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was no sentiment in his return. It was merely a feverish anxiety to be free, in exactly the opposite manner to the way he had hitherto wielded freedom. As then, he had wished to be free to become an exile, so now, he desired to be free to give up his exile. The mind was the same, the mind of the man who demanded to be untrammelled, whether for good or evil—a man, jealous of the freedom of dumb life, and demanding that sentient humanity should be allowed the same innings. It was following his new programme, that he travelled to Paris, and went to the best hotel, under another name. He wanted to be in closer touch with civilisation, and to see how he comported himself—whether he could stand himself in a new light. It was with some exhilaration, that of the sense of playing with fire, that he sought out the most frequented parts of Paris—old haunts—and ran the risk of meeting old acquaintances. Gradually his sense of humour, invested his performance with a degree of pleasurable interest. It amused him to have a friend raise his hat, or stare blankly, as he went by, asking himself if his eyes had deceived him, or whether this was the missing man, Traverdy. He became less a bear, in his intercourse with the men he met in the

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smoking-room of the hotel, and it was as if at last the human in him craved for the friendship, the companionship which even the Christ craved for. He would stop in the Tuileries and talk to little children; he would enter into long conversations with the waiter. The small things of life, the shop windows with their endless replicas of merchandise, fascinated him for the first time. He wandered through the Louvre, through the Salon, into curiosity shops and picture galleries. It was as if the nearer life had suddenly been revealed to him. He even became a little interested in an American girl at the hotel, and had driven her and her mother to a café in the Bois de Boulogne and given them a dinner. It had been the pleasantest evening he had spent.

Then, presently, that began to pall. The sense of having to begin life over again, to make new friends, inspired him with a feeling of desolation. To be a stranger, what an awful feeling it was; association loomed now the only thing to be desired, the only possible thing. And he became painfully conscious of the refraction of one's own personality. It seemed that the criticism of life, of Clifford Yelverton, gave back something which the impressions of his new self

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failed to do. He went to the theatres, and remembered his impressions of the same actors and actresses, the same dramas and comedies years ago, and wondered, with a new wonder, at the impressions they had made in those days. The new note of life coloured everything, and underneath the new impressions was a craving for the normal which would not be denied.

At times he had huge visions of sacrifice, sacrifice to the heir who had come so unexpectedly into good fortune. At times he was seized with the desire to be brutal, to reassert himself without consideration for any one's feelings, not even Lucille's, if she were married again. A species of jealousy invaded his being, of those, who seemed leading smooth, normal, even lives, the while he had become an outcast. He grew angry at the thought of how little he had been missed; the callousness of human beings towards each other loomed awful, but something within whispered, that life held some tender, vibrating fibre which needed constant attuning, constant scraping, and constant tension, and that, this performed, the fibre might attach to him, as it had done to others, some of the vital things which make life pleasant, forceful, alive, and which survive catastrophe and coldness and alienation, and

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graft on to one's being some of the attributes of immortality. He would have scoffed, if any one had told him, that what he felt, was the power, the necessity of love, to give sap to life, to hold events, and circumstances, and emotions together. The missing link between reality and reverie was missing, the mysterious link which moulds the commonplace. He had been realistic like the Greeks. He had needed no pen-painting, no subtleties of art. He had asked for the nude, and obtained it, the perfect thing, and now to-day it seemed to him that he needed the smaller intricacies, of life, the domestic duties, the responsibilities, the sense of being depended upon, of being an inspirational centre, around which interest, and affection, devotion even, crystalised. His loneliness, his solitude, would drive him mad, he said.

The next day, regardless of what consequences might arise, regardless of the feelings of Lucille, impelled thereto by an instinct he could not defile, he returned to England.

PART II

CHAPTER XII

"I WANT you to meet her. She is the most charming girl in the world." The speaker was a young and very pretty woman, and she was seated in a large conservatory in her husband's country house in Kent. Outside the scenery reminded him of Italy—after all, what difference between vines and hops? Nothing, except that courteous they bow down to England's more solid tastes, and make beer instead of "Chianti." As she spoke, he was thinking of the similarity of the world all over—the similarity of the differences. He had walked across the fields to Mrs Brodrick's house in answer to a note from her.

"Dear Mr Randolph," she had written, "will you forgive a very short invitation from your nearest neighbour and come and meet your neighbour on the other side?"

He had only seen her once before, the man who had lately come to Lichborough;

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and when he received the letter, he wondered who the neighbour on the other side could be, for, so far as he could see from his windows, there was nothing but a little cottage, smothered in honeysuckle. When he received the letter his instinct had been to refuse the invitation. His first instinct was always to refuse. Then he had walked over to the writer's house.

"I never go anywhere," he laughed grimly. But she liked his laugh. There was no doubt that he was a gentleman.

"Oh, but you must come, I want you to meet our show neighbour—Miss Prideaux. She is quite the most charming girl I ever met, and she keeps bees, we call her the hive princess. Once I called her the princess of the honeycomb, and she begged me never to do so in such a tragic way, that instead we call her the princess of the hive."

The princess of the honeycomb . . . where had he heard that appellation.

"She is so interesting. She has been two years here, and really, she is the most delightful girl we ever met."

"A 'girl,' you say; does she live alone?"

"She has an old companion, who was her governess—a dear old thing. They are like people in a novel. Of course, when she

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first came, the stupid old gossips thought it their duty to look severe, to make enquiries, but the lovely thing is, that nobody has been ever able to find out who she is, yet every one adores her. And she plays—oh, you should hear her play; can you imagine such a combination—bees and music? It reminds one of Maeterlinck. But the beauty of it is, that they say bees won't have anything to do with any one who isn't respectable. I told them that, and the bees adore her, so she is all right."

The pretty young woman laughed heartily. Her belief in the superstition made him laugh too. And the pretty woman went on:

"There was certainly something mysterious in the way she came; and it is so wonderful, her earning her living with bees, don't you think so? It is most interesting—the way she gathers them up in handfuls; she isn't a bit afraid of them. She sells the honey, you know. At first she used to send it to London, but presently every one began to buy it here. I assure you we live on honey, and Bob says he is going to start a locust farm."

The pretty woman laughed again, and her vaporous, inconsequent way of speaking, brought a sense of well-being to Randolph's mind.

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"Do you like honey? Whether you do or you don't, you'll have to order some—she is your neighbour; and oh! I am quite sure that when you have seen her you will want to buy honey every day."

"I don't think I have been to a dinner party for ten years." He spoke appealingly, as if he asked her not to press him to come.

"Oh! but it isn't a dinner party at all. only Bob and myself and the bee Princess—Miss Prideaux."

"I don't believe I've got a dress suit."

"Well, come as you are."

She was not to be daunted.

"You know if you live in Lichborough you've got to be sociable."

She spoke with the easy certainty of being the principal person in the neighbourhood of Lichborough. Her husband's family had been that, for generations, and he was the typical country squire. His place was the prettiest for miles around, and he was well off; it had seemed quite natural that he should marry the pretty daughter of the member. And she had brought into the place an element of brightness, which had been lacking; they kept open house, and open house to everybody, in a promiscuous fashion that became the member's daughter.

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"It is so fatiguing to be exclusive in the country," she would say, and she received everybody with open arms. It was she who had discovered Marie Prideaux. At first Lichborough had been inclined to resent the aloofness of the spinster who had taken Sweetbriar Cottage. The last owner had also been a mysterious lady, a mysterious lady, who had left the neighbourhood under suspicious circumstances and leaving unpaid bills behind. There had been stories of visitors, principally men, who spent Sunday there, and there were tales of many lighted candles burning in the windows till the small hours of the morning.

Bob had forbidden her to call, and Marie Prideaux had for a time inherited the reputation of the cottage. She had not known its history when she had taken it. She had seen the advertisement in a paper, and had run down to look at it, and been charmed with it, and especially with the moderate price which the estate agent realised, was yet a fair one for a place with unsavoury associations. She had never counted on knowing anybody, never wanted to. She had come to Lichborough to earn her living, imbued with the passion for Nature, for the soil, which takes possession of the lonely, the disconsolate. She was busy

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too. Her bees were not her only occupation—she had her music and her garden. She had given herself over to performing the miracles which are the fascination of gardening, the miracles of pruning, and grafting, and planting, the creative work of cuttings, and she was happy. Now and then, very rarely, she flitted to London for a week, and saw her friends, and went to a play.

“If I didn’t do that,” she declared, “I might strike root here in the soil, one damp day, and not be able to get away.”

Then one morning she had met Mrs Brodrick by accident. Mrs Brodrick’s motor-car had broken down at the foot of her garden, and one of the children had had a nasty scratch on its face, and the mother had not cared at whose garden she was, and had accepted Miss Prideaux’s offers of assistance with gratitude. She had spent over an hour in Sweetbriar Cottage, and been charmed with its owner. There were signs of wealth everywhere, that she was a lady. Her writing-table, the furniture, the artistic arrangement of the bowls of flowers, the grave demeanour of the one maid, her dress, her voice, the very touch of her hands were those of a woman accustomed to the beautiful things of life, yet to the things

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that do not charm the heart of the frivolous. The books and magazines scattered about spoke of the woman's taste in reading, and the benign old lady who chaperoned her, had the demure obsequiousness of a woman who has been accustomed to people of position. Then her voice, her manner, were reserved, without being mysterious; and she was quite at her ease as she sponged the wound, and bound it up, and made the child rest in a big arm-chair by the window.

"How can I thank you?" Mrs Brodrick had asked her, and she had said quaintly :

"Perhaps, one day, you will buy some of my honey; I am always on the look-out for the honey." And at the word "honey," the child had looked up, and all her discomfort had been forgotten, in the thrills of having a plate set before her, with a great slice of amber honey upon it, accompanied by a snowy loaf.

While the child ate, Mrs Brodrick talked, and Marie Prideaux told her a little bit about her life, but only what concerned the present: her life as a bee-keeper, as a gardener, her successes and her failures in her trade.

When Mrs Brodrick got up to go, she said: "Now you will come to see me, won't you?"

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And mind you bring lots of honey; Betty just loves it, don't you, darling?"

And Marie Prideaux had smiled, a reserved smile, which conveyed the idea that she had suffered, and knew a great deal more of life than other people, and hesitated. Then she said: "I hope, Mrs Brodrick, that you won't think it necessary to invite me because you happened to have come to grief at my garden gate, without knowing anything about me, don't you see."

"Don't you think there are some people that one knows everything about the moment one sees them?" Mrs Brodrick had asked pleasantly.

"Yes, and yet one day, when, if ever, you know me better, you will find out that there are a great many things about me which you do not know to-day." She spoke with a touch of mischievousness in her voice, as if it pleased her to mystify her visitor, to be taken, if she were taken at all, on her own merits. She had grown of late to philosophise, and she had been amused at the exclusiveness of Lichborough, its mistrust; while she wondered what each would say of the other, if the hearts of each could be read? It amused her to be looked upon as a suspicious character.

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"Is it something very dreadful?" Mrs Brodrick asked, laughing.

"Well, I am quite respectable. I know that I never, never could have been so dull had I not been completely respectable; but I have had a strange life, and I have to be very reticent with my best friends."

"Why should everybody know your business?" Mrs Brodrick spoke warmly. She was quite sure that this woman was all right. Her instincts told her so, and her superstition about the bees, that proved it; and then, her face was sincere, and she had said that she was respectable—Mrs Brodrick felt that she was telling the truth.

"I should not like to become your friend, your acquaintance rather, I should say, and then one day be dropped, don't you know, because I couldn't tell you anything about myself. I would have to be taken on trust, don't you know." She smiled sweetly. "I could never tell you anything about myself, because I have come *here* to get away from everybody, from everything; and if I told you I would 'be discovered, and all would begin again."

"I don't want to know anything, but I shall be very offended if you don't come to see me."

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When Mrs Brodrick and her wee girl teuffed teuffed away again, Marie Prideaux stood at the gate and followed them with her eyes.

"I wonder, I wonder," she murmured to herself. There was a wistful look in her eyes. Yes, it would be nice to be friends with that woman, to know the people around. The constant solitude, broken only by her companion's conversation, which, though genial, was not inspiring, was beginning to pall. Oh yes, it would be nice to see something of her fellow-creatures, but she was afraid that she would never see her late visitor again. She might receive a letter of thanks, perhaps, but Mrs Brodrick, why should she want to see her—the bee dealer, the obscure woman in Sweetbriar Cottage?

Of her beauty, her charm, she was quite unaware; sometimes she felt so old, so old, as if soon, she would cease to enjoy life at all. To-day a species of excitement invaded her being, which only those can fully realise who have been weeks and months alone. She chased the dog on the lawn, and came to the table with flushed cheeks, and a strand of hair detached from the great coils, with a bright look in her eyes that made her look five years younger.

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Her companion looked at her with an admiring, approving eye.

"I never saw you looking so pretty," she said. "Of course that is what you need at your age, some one to speak to who is young and bright and amusing, not an old, stupid thing like me."

"You old dear," Marie said, coming around to the dear old body's seat and giving her a hug. "There is no one I enjoy talking to so much as you; only when any one comes in like that, with a whiff, as it were, from another world, especially a pretty, fashionable woman like that, with a pretty dress, and oh! wasn't her hat pretty, so simple and yet so different to everybody else's, one can't help feeling that—that life has been a little cruel." Her voice hardened to keep something from rising in her throat.

"My dear, I know how you must feel, but it is in your hands, if you will."

"Now, Holo, dear, you know we have always said that——"

"Yes, I know," answered the old woman, "I know it is a forbidden subject, but——"

"There are no buts," Marie answered gaily, "only bees."

And the next day a note came from Mrs

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Brodrick, asking Miss Prideaux to lunch the next day. And, with a certain feeling of diffidence mingled with shyness, she had accepted.

The two women were more and more charmed at the other, and Bob Brodrick declared that she was the nicest woman they had met in the neighbourhood. It was much later, that, one day, Marie had said to her friend: "You have been so kind to me that I think you ought to know, that if ever you wanted it, I can refer you to mutual friends, friends you have mentioned to me, whom I know intimately. I would prefer you not doing so," because I have purposely broken with my past life in order to find occupation, to forget; but I can assure you that there is nothing in my life that I am ashamed of, nothing to prevent your befriending me. And I wonder if you know what your friendship means to me?"

"You absurd creature, as if I would ever ask anybody about you. As if I don't know that you are the best, dearest creature on earth—the sweetest; why, Marie, I sometimes wonder how I ever got on before you came here."

And now, after two years, the friendship was as strong as ever; stronger, built up

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on mutual respect, a respect which could afford to do away with confidences.

"I know that it must have been something terrible, that could make you want to come away from every one and lead this dreary life down here; and I don't want you to think of it, and telling me would remind you of it." Mrs Brodrick had once said when Marie had told her, that if she thought she owed it to her friendship, she would tell her the whole story.

"I want us to begin, just from that day when Betty was hurt, and to forget the past. After all, the past has nothing to do with our friendship."

Thus Marie Pridcaux's life, which had begun in such a solitary fashion, ended by becoming bright and pleasant. The dear human sheep followed in Mrs Brodrick's lead, and called; and, except for three months when the Brodricks went to London, Marie never passed a week without her spending a day with Mrs Brodrick, or her friend coming over to the simple little luncheon which she enjoyed better than her own. But Marie refused all her often-repeated invitations to run up and spend a few days with her in London.

"If I did so, the first person who came

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into the room I should probably know, or they would know me, and the cat would be out of the bag."

She was obstinate in her refusal.

And those were pleasant days which she spent at Leigh Court, days given over to music, and to pleasant games of golf and tennis, or croquet, and the discussion of books; to games with the children; and almost every week some pleasant friend ran down for a day or two to stay with the Brodricks, and Marie enlarged her circle of friends. Only one thing had been agreed upon between them, and that was that Mrs Brodrick shouldn't spring any one upon her unawares; that she was always to let her know the names of the people she was going to meet.

"You are like royalty, having your list of guests sent in. I only hope that the day won't come when some one will be scratched off." But, so far, there had been no untoward incident; albeit, Marie lived in dread of being caught unawares some day. She comforted herself, however, by telling herself that if there was an upheaval, no revelation would come to light that would bring her discredit.

And this evening, when Mr Randolph, after many protests, had agreed to come and dine, Eleanor Brodrick despatched a note to her,

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saying: "My dear, the new man is coming to dinner, and you must come. He is delightful." In a postscript she added: "His name is Randolph, and I hope that he is not going to be scratched."

CHAPTER XIII

AND when she had despatched the letter, Eleanor Brodrick mused for a moment at the strange coincidence—that this should be the second time in two years that a stranger should have come to the neighbourhood, apparently unknown, unacquainted with any one, and without introductions, and that in both cases they should have turned out to be charming people, people of the world, an addition to the somewhat limited society of Lichborough. A matchmaker at heart, as almost all women are, who have been happily married themselves, she was wondering whether, perhaps, they might take a fancy to each other. How romantic it would be. Of course, once he had met her, he would go and visit her, his neighbour, and then how natural it would be. It was absurd, such a lovely girl as Marie, leading the life she did, earning her living and working so hard. There had been the same inclination

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to criticise Mr Randolph in Lichborough which had possessed it when Marie Prideaux bought Sweetbriar Cottage, all the more when it became known that he was not a church-goer—which Miss Prideaux was—but the leniency with which he was treated was because he was a man, and apparently an unmarried man, and men were scarce commodities in Lichborough. The fact that he looked like a man who had lived, added to the attraction in the eyes of the spinsters of the neighbourhood, for there were few who could be called girls. Not an unmarried woman in the neighbourhood, but would have been willing to overlook his shortcomings, the shortcomings which are almost the virtues of the strong sex, in women's eyes, and to devote themselves to the saving of his soul. Regardless of his want of orthodoxy, of his somewhat mysterious appearance amongst them, they sent him little leaflets inviting him to lectures, to bazaars, to school feasts, to local entertainments, begging him to patronise local charities; and to all of these he responded with generosity. He never attended any of the entertainments, he never answered the letters, but he always sent the money, and with his name written across the sheet of paper which enveloped it, or on the cover. Sometimes,

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very rarely, he was to be seen in the town, and then these different ladies whose appeal he had responded to, yet who had not met him, bowed shyly, and something in the way he raised his hat brought thrills inexplicable.

He lived very simply. One discreet manservant attended to him, and, it had been discovered, he also cooked. He possessed one beautiful horse, which he rode or drove himself, and a dog. It gradually got about that he was a bookworm, and spent his nights in reading and writing. And the awe he had inspired at first, wore off when he was seen standing at the corners speaking to little children. He had first met Mr Brodrick at a sale of beautiful things, at a country house, seven miles away from Lichborough, and Mr Brodrick, who was a connoisseur, had been struck by a conversation he had overheard between Randolph and the auctioneer over a Sir Peter Lely. Randolph had scoffed gently at the idea of the picture being genuine, and the auctioneer had been inclined to grow hasty. His hastiness had died down, as Randolph made bid after bid for the most valuable things, especially for books with rare bindings, and of deceased editions. Presently, he and Mr Brodrick, had bidden against each other, for a statue by

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Thorvalsen. Mr Brodrick had two friends with him, and, apparently, knew every one in the room.

"Do you care for that particularly?" One of his friends asked him in an audible whisper.

"It isn't so much that, but I happen to have one which is evidently its 'pendant.' This is 'Morning' and I happen to have 'Night,' I'd like to have the two, but——" He glanced involuntarily at Randolph. The man's presentment had pleased him, now he wished him to the deuce.

"Thirty-five — forty?" The auctioneer's voice rang out, and he glanced "invitingly at Mr Randolph.

"Forty-five" was on Mr Randolph's lips as the words fell on his ear, "I happen to have 'Night.'" Mr Randolph was standing near Brodrick; their eyes met, and Mr Randolph laughed his short laugh, which was half-scoffing, half-genial, an outburst always against human folly.

"I haven't got the other," he said, "so I won't bid above you." Mr Brodrick began to protest.

"No, that's all right. I really don't want it at all." And already Randolph was half-way across the room examining a picture.

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Mr Brodrick's words, "I'm really awfully obliged," were lost amongst the crowd.

Finally Mr Brodrick's carriage failed to put in an appearance, and Mr Brodrick began fuming. He was due at a meeting at five o'clock.

"Won't you let me give you a lift?"

The tone was that of a well-bred man, accustomed to move on the same plane with one kind of man, and that kind of man the best; a man who knew that he was neither patronising nor snobbish, in offering the only available method of getting Mr Brodrick into town in time.

"I'm awfully obliged to you."

Brodrick scrambled into Randolph's carriage without hesitation.

"I'm awfully obliged, really," he began again, as Randolph's groom swung on to the back, and Randolph touched the horse with his whip.

On the road the two men became quite chatty. They had one common interest, curio-hunting, and both had all sorts of incidents to tell the other. How they had both been done, how they had both bought things for a song, and that were worth three times what they had given.

"That happens very rarely," Randolph had

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remarked grimly, then he added: "For being done give me Cairo. There is no place on earth where things that are not genuine appeal to one so."

All the way Brodrick caught himself making note of the things Randolph said, which brought him within the pale.

A few days later he went over and called, and asked Randolph to dinner.

"Why, you don't know me," he said, laughing his little grim, scoffing laugh. "I might be a convict for all you know."

"Well, but evidently you have done time or have a ticket of leave. I can at least promise you prison fare."

The two men had laughed with the buoyancy which comes of clear consciences, and the certainty that each has the right to the other's friendship.

Randolph refused, however.

"I really never go anywhere," he said, and excused himself; and Brodrick, who was almost as impulsive as his wife, had come away with a sensation of defeat.

His wife upbraided him for having failed in his mission.

"You can't go on bothering a fellow when he says he won't come."

Mrs Brodrick told herself that she would not

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have failed. Men were so horribly diffident, except where women were concerned. And she decided to write and invite him the moment he had called upon her, which he did, asking for the master of the house, and being introduced by the servant into the library, where Eleanor informed him that her husband was out.

Now to-day he asked himself whether he had made a *faux pas* in accepting her invitation. A species of recklessness invaded his being. If it was a *faux pas* it didn't much matter. He was bored to death by his own society. He would probably be doubly so by that of others, but it was an experiment.

It amused him hugely, when a baronet of this year's date took Mrs Brodrick in to dinner, and he went in after, as a sandwich, with Miss Prideaux, for, after all, Mrs Brodrick had added to her party.

"Don't think I have played you false," she whispered to him; "but I had to invite these people, and a *parti quarre* is so formal. It is almost like being alone, and I always tell Bob that there is nothing so absolutely official as when we dine alone. Mr Randolph—Miss Prideaux. You're close neighbours, you know. You must know each other—

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borrow each other's mowing-machines and all that."

She did not notice the strange, dreamy way in which Marie Prideaux held out her hand, as if some strange idea possessed her, as if she were wondering where she had heard the man's voice before—seen just such a figure. The face was unknown to her, and, after a few moments, the impression that she had seen this man before, died away.

At dinner they got on capitally. Randolph was completely taken out of himself by her simplicity, by her vivaciousness in moments of pause, by her calm and repose when conversation seemed superfluous. He had never been so fascinated by any one, and, above all, a woman; something forceful and strong appealed to him, and the new note patriarchal, sounded faintly from the shores of an unexplored self.

"After all," she remarked once, "how we humans limit ourselves, when we own the earth! how we create little pens for ourselves, in which we scarcely have room to turn around, when we might be wandering in spaces! don't you think so, Mr Randolph?"

"Do I think so? That is my creed. I have travelled a great deal, and the feeling I have, is that of knocking my head against

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the walls of the world. It isn't big enough for me; and as for uncivilised places—they don't exist even. After all, civilisation is comparative. It does not mean that because a man does not wear a chimney-pot hat and a frock coat that he is a savage. His beads may be the height of fashion in his country. The day will come when other countries which we now look down upon, have a civilisation superior to ours. We shall be travelling to South America, to the Steppes of Russia, to learn some little end-of-century trick we can learn nowhere else."

"Why do you think we hover so around the beaten tracks?"

Randolph laughed.

"Money," he said, "money. We may write a book in the desert, but we can't get it published there. The market—that is our heaven—the market. You could find honey in the Crimea, but you wouldn't be able to sell it."

"Isn't it despicable?"

"No; given the humans without the zest of money, they would have ceased to exist. There would be no object in life. The moment a man doesn't try to make money he becomes a watcher—a sleepy watcher, a contemplater, a browser on hilltops."

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"A browser? What a charming expression!" Once more the dreamy look came into Marie's face. This man had set her thinking of another man.

"And you travel a great deal, Mr Randolph?"

"I have travelled a great deal, but now I am tired of it. I am going to settle down just like everybody else—do all the things I have said I would never do."

"Even marry, perhaps." She laughed.

"Yes, I may even do that; it is quite on the cards." As he spoke, carelessly at first, a strange expression passed over his face. He couldn't marry; what was the use of talking about it? He was "talking" through his hat," as the Americans say.

Then suddenly a shadow passed over her face too.

"Mr Randolph, don't marry till you are sure you are not going to travel any more."

"Why? don't you think that my wife would be very glad to get 'rid of me for a time?"

"No." She spoke seriously. "All that talk of being glad to get away from each other is nonsense. Love is like a garden; you have to be pegging away at it all the time—cultivating it. The moment the humans break away from each other, they lose interest

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in each other. We are like the animals: a few hours of regret, a little food, and then we acclimatise ourselves, accustom ourselves, to the new conditions; at least men do."

"And the women?"

"Oh, they are different, they never forget."

Mr Randolph was silent. He was thinking of a woman, wondering if she had begun to forget; thinking of several women, of one fair woman with long hair far away beyond Iceland. Why had this tenacity of memory been given to women?

"How do you know all that?"

He spoke half-interested, half-scoffing.

"Well, I had a friend once, a great friend, and she married a man who travelled, a great explorer, and he went away and left her; and apparently he was quite happy, but she——"

"Well, what did she do?"

There was a note of intensity in his voice.

"Oh, of course she is an awful fool; she won't believe that he won't come back, she won't believe that he is dead, and, of course, her life has been ruined. You see a man who marries practically sells himself into bondage. With a woman it is different: she has an inheritance of bondage, that is different. But a man is a free creature, selling himself into slavery; that is different. He must be so sure

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that he won't want to run away. Myself, I wonder at every man who marries."

He looked at her a moment incredulously.

"And your friend, is she still waiting?"

"Oh yes. Waiting—why yes, she has practically stood at the hall door for twelve years."

"For twelve years?"

He was thinking of dates, and the coincidence of twelve years struck him half-humorously. Did all travellers stay away twelve years.

"And—and is she unhappy?" He spoke tentatively. "Does she mind, I mean?"

"She mind? Why, of course she minds. She was devoted to him, worshipped him, has never looked at another man, never will, I believe."

"Do you think that women ever care like that?"

He was not thinking of the other woman now, but of this one. She was beautiful, Marie Prideaux, but beyond her attractive expression being an invitation to confidence, an introduction, as it were, to her mind, he was not thinking of her beauty. He was thinking instead of what calm repose she inspired, how in keeping her whole presentment was, her face with her figure, her voice with her manner, the words,

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the sentiments she expressed, with the grave, half-tender expression of her face. Something new had been struggling to reach his mind for months. Now it seemed suddenly as if it had reached, and that he flung open the doors to receive it. The idea brought rest.

This was a woman who would never bother a man, who had her own interests, who understood life, and with the realisation that she was a woman in a thousand, came a vague regret.

Eleanor Brodrick, watching them out of the corner of her eye, grew absent-minded in answering the remarks of the new baronet, and told herself that things were going very smoothly in that quarter.

"Yes, I think that the right sort of woman is like that, just the difference in everything is stability, fidelity. After all, it is the only way we can make things immortal by continuing them, keeping them. A woman, a man who loves over and over again, why, that isn't love at all. He or she are simply *dilettantes*."

"And this woman, is she unhappy?"

"She was miserably unhappy, but now I think she has grown resigned. She has made a new life for herself. She is earning her living, and you say money adds a great zest to life. Anyhow, she isn't losing her time pining."

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"And he, where is he now?"

"Ah, no one knows. His lawyers think that he is dead, but she won't believe it. She says that if she thought he were dead she would feel as if her spine were broken, that there would be nothing to prop her up, that the thought has become part of her life, the thought that he is somewhere."

When he spoke again there was a note of irritation in his voice.

"Why doesn't she marry again?" he asked.

"That is what every one asks her, but she says that he may come back."

"I don't think he will."

A shadow passed over her face.

"No, I don't suppose he will now," she said musingly.

CHAPTER XIV

ALMOST for the first time of his life, Clifford Yelverton, for it was he, who was masquerading in Lichborough under the name of William Randolph, felt an acute loneliness, which was like physical pain, when he returned to his little house on the hill. Morley, his man, was waiting up for him, to let him in, to take the horse round to the stable. Then Clifford sent him to bed and entered his library. He had meant to work on his return—he was writing a book on the comparison between American sentiment, and the spirit of ancient Greece : he had a theory that in America the spirit was just the turn of the ball, the twist of the hoop, the circle of life, which turns the other side uppermost once in several centuries. The want of sentiment, the crudeness, the realism of America, was it not after all the renaissance of the Greek spirit, garbed in cheap, jew-made clothes, instead of flowing draperies? The work had interested him, served to obliterate the loneliness, brought him in touch with minds

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long since departed, which he strove to link with the nearer, palpitating minds of to-day. The touch of modernity, without his knowing it, was his need of human sympathy, which inspired him to bring down the spirit of the ancients, under the focus of modern usage, modern thought. The Greeks had not needed to have colour schemes, had not needed words in which to convey the idea of light and shadow, which is the craze of the modern writer. The shadow, with its breadth and depth, that had been enough for the Greek. It was enough to the American. The American would lose, rather than gain, by the super-imposition of explanation. The weakness of America lay in its beginning to copy complexity. His book was an appeal to America to keep crude, to stick to horizontal lines, forceful, magnificent, to avoid curves, the half-tones in which other natures, have striven to temper the truth to their own want of grasp of things, great and forceful.

But to-day, to-night, he could not write a line. Something human, dictated to him that his mind was worn out with thought, that the mechanism was too strong for the case, that the humanity of his being, the flesh, for want of usage, would not stretch further to hold the machinery that he had fashioned within.

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To-night the image of the woman, Marie Prideaux, haunted him, and haunted him derisively. He had met the woman of his dreams, the while he had not known that his mind held an ideal. And yet the words she had spoken to him about the other woman, her friend, had disturbed him, made him realise that he must not think of this woman, reminded him of his bondage.

To-night he scoffed gently at himself, instead of at the world. Strong, forceful, rose the desire to be as other men; to rise and lock away the life which hitherto had seemed the only one. His mind had grown beyond him, and the race of the flesh to keep up with it wearied him. Thus the millionaire gets away from the pomp of the palace he has built in Park Lane, and rushes to the tiny cottage by the river, which has only four rooms.

To-night great décisions must be come to; he must go away, go away just when his place, the neighbourhood, were beginning to appeal to him. Go away! Presently his thoughts returned to the woman she had spoken of. Could it have been Lucille that she had meant? Was it possible that she was still waiting for him?

The thought brought a touch of irritation; so might a man feel whose dog had followed

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him, a dog he doesn't want with him, yet who will not go back.

Why had she not married? Yet he remembered that if she had, he could never, never show himself again. He had tried the experiment of returning to England, and, so far, it had pleased him. To be sure, he had never been able to reveal himself, even to his own sister; but English life, the very decorum of his man, the man who wondered who he was, but who was satisfied with his personality, with his regular wage, had brought a sense of stability. Presently, he told himself, he would make new friends; and he had tried to tell himself that the loneliness suited him, that it was what he had wanted—quiet, to write his books. Now to-day, he told himself almost passionately that he wanted life, humanity, that he couldn't stand the isolation.

She had asked him to call upon her. He had driven her home. They two, divided by a few acres of land, each one solitary, unknown, each, apparently, with a past which stalked by their sides. Yes, he was sure that this girl had suffered, understood life. What more natural than that they should link their solitude, their disillusion, and, gathering the remains of their lives as they would gather fuel, should set fire to it, and watch together

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the one flame which would spring up, warm themselves by it, before their blood grew cold, their hearts, their souls stultified, so that no flame could warm them. He laughed his short, scoffing laugh as he paced the room, and looked out on to the dark country. How quiet, how dark were the English nights, how decorous, in comparison with the nights of the East, of other countries, when the soul seems to wake in the darkness, and steal abroad, to the light of fire-flies, and the whistle of frogs and crickets. His short laugh meant that he realised, that he, Clifford Yelverton, was in love, had fallen in love at first sight. Then something forceful, barbarous almost, which he had culled from the foreign countries in which he had travelled, whispered to him that he must possess himself of this woman. After all, humanity was the same all the world over. England had reduced everything to submission, laid pipes, as it were, for all its emotions ; but the pipes burst sometimes, and one water coursed as freely in one place as another. This woman he would carry off, but she must be made to listen to him, to understand that she was the woman he wanted, the only woman, for whom he was the only man who would suit her. They two, standing on a hill together, could subdue the world.

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He remembered suddenly, how he had said to Lucille that they would visit Mars, but Lucille had not had the vitality, the strength, needed for a journey to an unaccustomed planet. With this woman he could take possession of Mars, and people it with young gods.

Presently he strode out into the night, and wandered about his garden, and beyond, to the fields that touched hers.

He gazed at the dark mass which was her cottage. How silent, how irresponsible it looked. What would she say if he knocked at her door and demanded admittance? Yet so would he have liked to woo her: to enter and lay his head on her lap, and be at rest; and bid the past, his great thoughts, and the thoughts of others which he had imbued, be silent. To-night, some of the weariness, some of the great dreads of his childhood, were upon him. And with them the need to hold a hand, to speak, to tell, and piercing his desire for the normal, the patriarchial, for simplicity, a great hate of the woman he had married, who was waiting, waiting, and whom he knew he had wronged.

How could he get rid of her? Instinctively, without knowing he did so, he wished she might die. He wanted the world to himself.

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And she, Marie Prideaux, she did not quite know what had come to her. The man who had taken her into dinner had fascinated her, and with the fascination a hundred thoughts of the past had arisen. Was it possible that after all these years her mind was going to fail her, her heart?

Eleanor Brodrick had asked her to play, and she had begun playing more beautifully than ever before; then, suddenly, she broke off. "I have forgotten the end," she said.

And Eleanor Brodrick had gone to the piano and asked her to play something else, and Marie had looked up at her with something-agonised in her expression and said: "Don't ask me to play to-night, dear, somehow I can't; I don't know why." And Eleanor Brodrick had seen that her eyes were full of tears, and desisted.

Then, when the Brodricks were about to order the carriage for Marie, Clifford had offered to drive her home, and the sense of adventure, a species of recklessness, had invaded her being, and she had accepted.

They had driven along almost in silence, and Marie had been conscious of a feeling of irritation with herself, at the restfulness she felt in this man's presence, at the forceful

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presentment of power he seemed to inspire. Could it be that the flesh was dominating her, the flesh that had been aroused so many years ago, then lain dominant for twelve long years? She hated the thought. It made her feel as if the spirit was but a creation of the fancy, that it had no vitality. It lowered her in her own estimation; yes, it gave the impression that all humanity was alike, that care and cultivation of the mind, and thought led nowhere, that all paths led to the same issues, and that those issues were insignificant ones, dwarfed issues side by side with the huge flights the mind took into space. And there was a feeling of shame, that she should at the eleventh hour, as it were, have to pay her dues to humanity. She was busy telling herself, that it was only because she had led such a retired life that the personality of this man took possession of her. It was when they had nearly reached her cottage, that she uttered words, that on the night stillness seemed fraught in mystery :

“In your travels, Mr Randolph,* did you ever meet a man called Clifford Yelverton, a traveller, an explorer?”

For nothing on earth could she have kept back the words.

He was silent for a moment, wondering if

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she guessed who he was, or if she were trying to find out.

"Yes, I used to know him once." He uttered his short laugh. He was beginning to wonder if he had ever really known the man, Clifford Yelverton. "Yes, I knew him—a rum sort of chap."

And, in the darkness, impelled thereto, it seemed, Marie went on: "He was the man I meant, who ought never to have married, the husband of my friend. Her name is Lucille Yelverton, and the poor thing is still waiting for him; still imagining that he will return. Isn't it piteous? Oh! I wish some one could throw some light upon it. I wish she could know, feel free."

"Do you think that she wants her freedom?"

He spoke carelessly, but a note of eagerness pierced.

"I don't know." The voice was musing. It seemed to her that perhaps, after all, if Lucille were free, she would grow to care again. It seemed like it to-night. Something seemed to insist from within, to insist on a sudden end to her patience, to demand that it snapped suddenly, like a box that is closed. The question was, would any one turn the key so that she would never be able to open it again? That was what she was afraid of.

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She had always felt, hitherto, as if some one possessed the key of the box which contained her mind, some one who might turn up at any minute. It had given her a sense of want of freedom, of possession. She should not have given the key into any one's keeping, she told herself.

Now, to-night, she was ready to lend the key to this man, to take it away, demand it of the other man.

To-night, as she undressed, something unaccustomed entered her being. Since she had come to live at Lichborough, she had tried to borrow the spirit of the farmers, to go to rest early, and to sleep the sleep which comes of living in the open air, the sleep which is perfumed with honeysuckle and clover, and thyme, perfumes which preclude dreams, stifle them with their pungency. She had risen early, and schooled her thoughts to method, as she had schooled her body, giving it over to invigorating, sane methods, to splashings in cold water. Now something whispered that she had been playing at farming, that she had built a *petit trianon*, and that the charm of the *trianon* had been the certainty of the feeling, that she could play the *marquise* at any moment, and that a *marquis* would milk the cows for her.

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Now, to-day, when she had to do the work, when she had taken the place of worker, in the ranks of the bread-winners, the labourers, the necessity of it, took away from the sweetness, added a responsibility which wearied her, distressed her, alarmed her. It was awful to think of what life meant, of years of solitude, of weary bickerings with fate, of alternations of resurrection moments, bursting from the death-damp, as it were. The want of quiet progression of thought that comes with the ties of duty, with the ties of kindred, in which the whole being is submerged, swamped, taken out of itself by necessitous duties, one has no time to analyse, which, being compulsory, carry on from hour to hour, from day to day, paralyzed her.

There was something unusual in the way she glided into the house, silently, when her companion opened the door, having elected to sit up rather than keep up the maid, who had to light an early fire.

Her companion was aware of a new emotion in her voice, something which made one feel as if she had seen a vision. There was something that seemed to hold her breath, as, in answer to the question—"Did you have a pleasant evening?" she replied:

"Yes, charming." There was reserve in the way she went straight to her bedroom.

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Holo wondered if at last she had met one of the fatal ones she dreaded to meet, and what had happened.

The nice old woman awaited a cataclysm, daily invoked it. It was all very well for herself, but for a woman of Marie's age, it was unnatural, a waste of the vitality of life.

And, once in her room, Marie upbraided herself again, conscious that the crucial moment of her life had arrived, and vaguely dismayed, as she realised that the reason of her strength hitherto, had lain in the fact that the temptation had not been strong enough, that she had not cared.

He was coming to see the bees to-morrow, he had said; and he would come the next day, and the day after that, and always. She knew it. And if he did, she felt that unconsciously she would glide into just what she had steadily avoided gliding into. If he was a good man, how would it end for him? For her? If he was a bad one, what then? Her thoughts frightened her. She threw herself down on her knees, and imagined that she prayed. Perhaps the anxiety, the fear at her heart, were prayers, but her lips did not move, nor her mind shape words.

Once she awoke in the night with a vague

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disquietude, the sense of trying to lull her conscience to rest by telling herself that she was free, that she would be justified.

When she awoke in the morning, her hundred duties brought a readjustment of her being. She told herself that she had had a moment of weakness which it must be her duty to conquer. He knew Clifford Yelverton, he had said, and she would ask him more, where he was when he had seen him last. It was with a quiver of dismay almost, that she realised that if he told her anything definite she would be filled with doubt. She preferred to go on as she had done, not knowing, imagining, faithful. Yet a great fear haunted her, the fear lest too much time had gone over her head, as if the last twenty-four hours had consumed to the end her patience, which had lasted up to the final twelve hours, and then given way, given way just when it was most needed. She remembered that she had seen racers fighting so manfully, and then dropping away at the goal. Naturally, no one would blame her; everybody had been in league against her, and she had come away in order to fight her own battles. Now it seemed to her, that fate scoffed at her, had played her a trick. In London she would not have met this

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man. A feeling of powerlessness in the face of life overcame her. They were wrong, who said that we hold life in our own hands, could wield it. And then another horror came, and arraigned itself alongside the others, like clouds massing in the horizon—the horror, if when Clifford Yelverton returned, she would no longer wish to see him, no longer want him to come back. The idea was awful, and the long years of fidelity, of waiting, seemed to mock her with their emptiness.

Then other feelings came and joined that one.

What if Mr Randolph came to know that she was Lucille Yelverton, and, knowing, went away?

CHAPTER XV

TOWARDS evening she grew restless again. The hour was approaching when he had said he would come, and she had resolved to tell him. Now, as the afternoon shadows grew long, she chid herself. Perhaps he would not come. He had forgotten. Once she smiled to herself, as she told herself that that was just what Clifford Yelverton would have done, to forget his engagement. But the thought brought a blush of shame. He had forgotten, and she—she had taken it for granted that she had made an impression. It was simply disgusting, the weakness of her nature, which she had thought strong; she recoiled before it.

“Is the princess of the honeycomb at home?” • •

It was his voice, and it sounded somewhere from behind the hedge. “The princess of the honeycomb,” he had said, forgetting that Eleanor Brodrick had told him that the name made her angry. But she did not mind it

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so much from the lips of Mr Randolph. It seemed suddenly to have taken her back years, to another garden, where a tall man, something like this one, but clean-shaven and younger and far more sprawling, had lain on the grass; and a flush rose to her cheeks. The habit of years, the habit of sensitiveness grown to be part of herself, resented the remembrance the words evoked.

"Oh, you mustn't call me that," she said, "it reminds me of so many things, some one ——" she broke off. "The funny thing is, that when I was called that, I had nothing to do with bees."

"And now that you have, you won't be called it. That is, of course, human nature. It prevents congestion of emotions."

She laughed.

He was still on the other side of the hedge.

"Do you never come round by gates?" she said.

"Not when I live on the other side of the hedge. One day I will ask the lady of the hive, to permit a gate to be made that leads to my field."

"That will have to be a long time hence," she said awkwardly, "when I am quite, quite sure that my bees approve."

He remembered what Mrs Brodrick had said

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about the morality of bees, their Puritanism, and he fell to musing. It just followed out his theory, that Nature pursued one scheme throughout. There were policemen that were not human, policemen, in the animal world, in flowers—the spiked flowers which keep guard, and which are so extremely *Sainte n'y touche*, that every one leaves them alone; and there are hideously immoral animals and abandoned flowers.

She did not know the thoughts her words had given rise to, and she wondered at his silence. It made her feel awkward.

“Come round to the gate and I will meet you,” she said gaily. Suddenly she felt very cheerful. “Come round,” she said again, but he walked a little further away, and vaulted over the hedge without touching a leaf of it. She and he were both conscious, that he had been inspired with a wish to look boyish, to do away with the idea that he was growing old. She remembered that once, the same spirit had possessed her in a game of rounders. She had rushed madly round, with the feeling that the movement was not in keeping with her age, that she had grown prematurely old. Yet afterwards she had felt, that the impulse had not been genuine, that it had not been an impulse for movement—activity for its own

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sake. It had been a pose of youth. He held his hat in his hand, and she noticed that his dark hair was streaked with grey. She was glad that after all she was a married woman; that if people talked of his visit, and they were sure to talk, that she could ultimately hide behind the protection of her married state, albeit her husband was not alive—if she was a widow. How funny it was not to know if one was or not. Well, widows were allowed to do most things.

She introduced him to her companion, then the companion discreetly disappeared. She gave him tea beneath great copper beeches, and the feeling of well-being grew and spread. At seven o'clock, he had not suggested leaving, he had never had any idea of the *convenances*; he paid long visits like the Orientals, and she had allowed him to smoke. Lazily he told her of the things that were wrong in her garden. Once he stooped and worked for a long time at a rose-bush, forgetting her presence, and she had taken the opportunity to go and ask her companion if there was enough dinner.

At half-past seven, dinner was announced, and he seemed to take it for granted that he had to stay.

She directed the maid to take him to the

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spare room to wash his hands. It was then that he asked :

“Am I going to stay to dinner?” He was conscious how much her answer—“Why, of course,”—pleased him.

After dinner he wandered out on to the lawn and smoked a cigar. Her rooms looked too dainty, too diaphanous to permit smoking.

For an hour she sat and wrote letters, conscious that he was happy alone, and with a sudden feeling of confidence growing up in her, of safety. It was so long, so long since a man had protected her ; when he had, it had been a man like Pennant who wanted to marry her. This man would never marry anybody, she told herself. Later, when it was dark, she would sit outside and tell him her story. At dinner he had grown brilliant and told them of his travels, with a sudden recognition of the fact that he must pay for his dinner by being interesting. The passion for gregariousness was upon him, he was growing to hate his lonely evenings, his nights.

She finished her letters and despatched them by the old man who always came to fetch them. He heard her giving orders about honey that was to be delivered in the morning, about vegetables that were to go to market to be sold, about chickens that were to be killed,

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about eggs that were to be left at a neighbouring farm. The business tone, reminded him of, he could not quite tell what. Suddenly he told himself that it would be nice to be managed by this woman ; she commanded without being autocratic, without being a domineering woman. He would like to give his life over to her and let her tell him what to do. Presently he would tell her the predicament he was in, yet something told him that the day he did so something would come to an end. The bees had said that she was strictly moral. The idea that he was married would alarm her, he felt sure. The hatred he felt for Lucille was growing to large proportions. Why could she not have taken the money and let him go his way ?

"I have done all my business." The voice came from a tall, slight figure, standing at a French window, with the light behind it.

He turned and looked at her. Something reminded him of somebody, of some woman he had seen. His soul filled with horror. Then he told himself that obsessed with one idea he could not get rid of the image of Lucille.

"I'll come out and have a chat with you. Isn't the night lovely?"

The stars had scattered a fillet, studded with precious stones, across the dusky mane of the night, the air was heavy with honeysuckle and

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jessamine and mignonette, and from the hives came the smell of honey.

He was conscious of feelings he had never had before : a strange longing seized him to be alone with her. She turned into the house again. In the window above, he heard her say :

" I shan't be late, dear."

He heard her tell the maid to go to bed. Then it seemed to him that the two, she and her companion, whispered. He heard a murmuring sound like the whisper of the sea, and he felt like an eavesdropper and moved further down the lawn. He heard her voice laughing merrily.

" You silly old thing."

But there was the unmistakable note of gladness, a gladness which pleased him. His brief experience of women had been tears. Then she stepped out into the darkness and stood beside him, then she fell into a low chair and he dropped down into another. And for a long time both were silent, listening to the voices of the night, while, without knowing it, the same question rose in both their minds. Who is this man? Who is this woman? They both formed a resolution to tell the other, then let the resolution go. Presently she followed up the things he had

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told her at dinner, things which reminded her of the way Clifford had talked to her in the old days, never dwelling on the things most people tell of voyages, but of weird things, of phenomenon, and beauty and peculiar presentment, breathing the spirit of other lands, of the great truths of the desert, of the wild comprehensiveness of the nations which are not supposed to understand, yet which have guided, are still guiding, the nations to the unseen garden without.

"We owe all our beliefs to the Moham-medans," he said, and she remembered that that had been Clifford's creed, how he had told her, that one day there would be great alliances of faith which would outwit the political alliances, the brotherhood of Moham-medanism all over the world, the alliance of Buddhism, and that the alliance which would fail, would be that of the Christians. To-night she was bathed in reminiscence, the while she strove to put the past away from her.

"Do you like the quiet of the country, the loneliness?" she asked presently; and he laughed the scoffing, careless laugh which reminded her so forcibly of Clifford, so far as she could remember his laugh.

"Do you?" he asked her for all answer.

"I wonder sometimes," she went on

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"When I am at work—yes, and when I am very tired; but there are moments, I confess, when I tell myself, that the only thing in life is movement, that the duties we perform at our own bidding, are not duties at all, that we are missing our vocation when we do not do something for other people, that the imposed life, is the only real one, the one that is made for us by circumstances."

She spoke a little wearily; she realised always at moments of quiet, how aimless, how ambitionless, was her life. Sometimes the injustice of it all welled up. It did to-night, sitting here with this man. If her husband were still alive, how cruel not to come to her—not to try and find out how it fared with her! If he were dead, how was it that life held back the knowledge—that she was not allowed to be free? If she knew that he were dead, she would, at least, allow her mind to dwell on love. Now, she still told herself that it was not permissible.

The idea of duty! that had never troubled Clifford Yelverton hitherto; the fact that this woman discussed it, as the only thing, was a revelation, and brought something new, something of shame, into his thoughts. And in her tones, he detected the ring of sincerity.

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She spoke from experience, as one who has probed life.

"I am afraid that I have never looked upon life as a responsibility." He spoke shyly, then he laughed, as he always did. To this man who had understood the secrets of Nature, it seemed that the Almighty, if He were as great as people made out, would not care much what he, Clifford Yelverton, did. It was quite possible, that in the general make-up of various people, various characters, a few loafers were allowed, and suddenly it seemed to him that he had done a lot of thinking, that he had thought for a dozen, a score, of brainless ones, and that his time had not been lost. Once more the impulse to tell her, to ask her advice, rose and died away again. "Of course, it's different with a woman," he said presently.

Lucille turned upon him with a sudden flash of anger.

"Why is it different?" she said. "Do you men think that the laws of God were made only for women? Of course, the laws of men are," she added with a laugh—a laugh which seemed to release her wrath. The bitterness in her voice had struck him, and he wondered again what was the story of her life, why she lived here alone, why she worked for her

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living, the while he realised that what he enjoyed most about her, was the fact that he did know nothing, that they were two strangers to each other, to Lichborough, drawn together by the singularity of their fates, and by the common mystery which enveloped them both; and by something stranger, a strange affinity which dominated them both, an affinity which was as though they had both been dropped into a Garden of Eden, and that it was decreed that they should be company for each other. He was quite prepared that there would be some revelations concerning her. He did not think she was married or divorced, but he was sure that she had led a sad life. He hated the idea of a woman working for her living.

Presently the magic of the night began to weave its web of mysterious enchantment around him. Why had he no part in the adventure of life, he asked himself. He thought of the many countries he had traversed, and how few women he had ever spoken to. He had been, in a way, afraid of the species. He had been faithful to Lucille, not from any moral reason, but simply because he felt a fear of resuming the subject of woman. To-night he was

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glad. that he had led a clean life—as glad as if it had been his own doing. He was convinced of some inherent nobility in her character which would reject what was unclean. He was conscious, to-night, that this woman would make a man better, and that now he was in a mood to be reformed, the while he had scoffed at women's feeble attempt to woo men's souls to heaven. He was conscious now of something he had missed out of life. Soon, in an hour at latest, he would have to get up and go away, conscious that he would have liked to have sat on here, watching the stars grow brighter in the darkening night, then fade away beneath the cold touch of dawn.

"I didn't wish to annoy you by my remark." He laughed as he spoke. "I meant that women are so much more conscientious than men—luckily."

Once more she spoke bitterly: "I wonder where they would be, where the world would be, if they were not."

"And yet"—he spoke musingly, as if, while he uttered the words, he had seen the other point of view—"And yet the question is, whether men are not more straightforward in their want of conscience; a woman pretends a great deal, even to herself."

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Yesterday Lucille would have flown out at him, to-night his words struck home. Had she been pretending to herself, playing the comedy of fidelity, because infidelity, love, had not been strong enough to lure her?

To-night she was aware of dual emotions. Clifford Yelverton—she no longer desired him, the while something in this man brought back the past—vivid, remorseless, realistic in detail. She seemed to be reading the letter again, to be talking to the elderly lawyer. The image of her mother flitted before her, and with it a tinge of remorse. Had her mother been right after all, and she wrong, in waiting for one who was unworthy, since he neither returned nor set her free?

And then somehow, in the darkness, her thoughts returned imperative, the dominating influence of her life.

"We were talking about Clifford Yelverton," she said. "How long is it since you saw him?"

There was a moment's silence, then throwing away his cigar, he said:

"Why do you ask?" There was a feverish intensity in his voice.

"Oh, I don't know, only it seems so hard on his wife; if he is dead she might marry again, don't you know—lead a little bit of a

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life. If he is alive, why doesn't he return? Do you think he is dead?"

Clifford Yelverton laughed. "How can I tell?" he asked.

"Oh, you might have heard."

Then suddenly he turned and looked at her. "If he is alive, do you think it is his duty to return to his wife?"

She did not know how he dwelt on her answer, how he waited for it. She did not realise that to-night it was a question of life and death to him, to know what this woman thought, this woman who seemed to have common-sense above every other woman he had ever met. She was silent for a long time, then she said, a little coldly: "I don't know. I really don't know."

He drew a breath of relief.

CHAPTER XVI

AND every day found Clifford Yelverton at Sweetbriar Cottage. At first he had presented himself shamefacedly, begging her to go on with her work, attending to something in her garden, making excuses. Then he ceased to make excuses. And Eleanor Brodrick was delighted, the while she told Marie how people were talking.

"Let them talk," Marie had said, with a recklessness which was not natural to her. "Do you imagine that I have come away from everything, from everybody, in order to still continue to consider what the world says?"

"No, dear, but——" Her attitude mystified Mrs Brodrick.

"But what, dear? We have always been frank with each other——"

"It's only that we don't know anything about him, don't you know." Marie laughed.

"Nor do you about me."

"Oh, Marie, it is so different. He may

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have a wife somewhere. It is so different. A man who doesn't work must have means, and if he has means, it seems so peculiar that he doesn't go to London, go about."

"He has travelled all over the world. He is tired out, he told me so, and horribly lonely."

"Marie, I believe that you are in love with him."

Lucille looked at her friend with her starry eyes.

"Don't breathe a word, dear, but I am madly in love."

"My dear, how exciting, but Marie, do be careful. Supposing he has a wife somewhere, hidden away, a sort of Jane Eyre business, don't you know."

"And supposing I had a husband — how do you know I haven't? I always wear a wedding-ring, don't I?"

"You told me it was your mother's."

For the first time a cloud of doubt rested for a moment on Eleanor Bredrick's mind, then it floated away. No, even if Marie had a husband, everything was all right. He, the man, was to blame, not she. And sometimes it had seemed to her that Lucille was like a married woman in some things. She had let drop phrases, which showed that she

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knew a good deal, but then what girl didn't in the present day, and Lucille was thirty-one.

Once more Lucille had it on the tip of her tongue to tell her friend the history of her life. It seemed to her that she owed it to the Brodricks to be frank with them, but now something new sealed her lips, something which seemed to impel her to silence, because something else within, would not be denied, and that to tell her story would be to hamper her movements, her desires. The man, William Randolph, fascinated her. It seemed as if it were given to her to understand his vagueness, a vagueness which held in it the elements of immensity. He was magnificent, reminding her of lurid sunsets, of pine-forests, of mountain gorges, and at times, there pierced a tenderness which was like the breeze which whispers across tender field flowers, curling in and out of the leaves, insidious, perfumed.

She was not aware that what she noticed was something new, which had come to him in his exile, that he had had to appeal to the humanity of the world, who had always thought to stand alone; that he was a returning prodigal without the welcome, that he was tired, tired of loneliness, and confused in his theories of life which had all seemed

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to fail him, the while some inner instinct, stronger than life, forbade him to return to bondage, the bondage which his whole being shrank from, the bondage of the woman who had not understood him, who had wanted him to be like other men.

Yet, when her friend left her, Lucille took herself to task. She was being talked about, and to what end? This man, as Eleanor had said, no one knew him; he seemed bound by none of the conventionalities which hamper other men, which make them act, at least outwardly, like each other. Yes, she could imagine that perhaps he had a wife somewhere. The thought brought pain. She could imagine that just in this way Clifford might have spent evenings with a lonely woman, and not have told her that he had a wife. She wondered when he had left her, whether there was anywhere a woman waiting, eating her heart out, as she had done.

And in those days she was conscious of a little aloofness on the part of Eleanor Brodrick, a little jealousy, a little resentment at her ready acquiescence in his companionship, and with it, a feeling of impotency to explain that this man appealed to her, Lucille, above any she had ever met. After she had bidden

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him good-bye she lingered on the little verandah, and wondered why she hated so to hear him go. He had leaped over the hedge again, and she told herself, smiling, that she must stop his doing that, it would never do. He must be broken in. she told herself, and something within, said that he would submit to everything at her hands. So sometimes an animal, who has always been savage, will respond to one hand.

Suddenly, as she stood by her window, with her hair down, she sighed. Only thirty-one, and yet how long she seemed to have lived. Was an end coming now, or was this a dream which would dispel, a dream like that of her short span of married life? Would this man go away suddenly, as he had come, wander away behind the moon, as Clifford, her husband, had done, and never return?

Then as he came the next day, and the next, she told herself that she would chain him.

Then next day, she returned to her questioning.

Could he throw no light on Clifford's whereabouts, would he make enquiries? A woman's life, a woman's happiness, depended upon it. And once more he asked her: "If he

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were alive do you think the woman, Lucille, would take him back?"

Ah, it was a difficult question to answer.

Then one day when she referred again to the subject, he asked her: "And suppose that in his wanderings he had met a woman who suited him better, who understood him, do you think that Mrs Yelverton would still want him back, would still insist?"

"Insist?" Lucille spoke musingly. "She has never insisted, only waited to see what was best for him, what would make him happiest. I don't think she ever thought of herself."

He spoke more earnestly than she had ever heard him.

"Do you think that if she knew that he would never care for her, that she would release him, divorce him?"

It seemed to her that he knew where Clifford Yelverton was, that he was pleading for his friend, and the thought that Clifford cared for another woman brought pain, and yet if——

Oh, the thought was intolerable. If she were nothing to this man after all, and yet that Clifford had ceased to care, lived and would not return. The thought humiliated her.

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"Has it ever struck you?" she asked, "that perhaps his wife is different now, that she is wiser, more tolerant, less a child, that perhaps Mr Yelverton would find in her now the woman of his dreams?"

"Oh no! no!" He spoke irritably. "Those kind of things are never made up. She, she could never forgive, never forget."

"She forgave long ago; she blamed herself. Ah, you don't know how unhappy she has been, is still, and yet——" She broke off. He was not listening to her. He was pacing up and down the lawn in the dusk. Her words disturbed him. Of late, the bondage had seemed so much less painful, the desire to be free so much less acute. He was content to lead this life, to continue it indefinitely. The idea that he could not continue it, that this woman was beginning to care for him, that people were beginning to talk—all that he never noticed. The companionship, that was enough for the present, and the girl seemed to understand. She, too, seemed content.

It was Eleanor Brodrick who opened his eyes. Now and then, very rarely, he strolled down to her lovely place, and sat amongst the roses, or played with the children. Eleanor Brodrick had revolved the matter

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in her mind, and come to the conclusion that she had a certain amount of responsibility in the matter. Of course they were old enough to look after themselves, but Marie was her friend, and this man — she knew nothing at all about him.

He found her sitting on the lawn with her children and her dogs, the whole party irrevocably mixed up: the tail of a dog and a child's bare leg—he could not make out where they began, where they ended—and the head of a lovely child with golden curls, lying face upwards in his mother's lap. The sight appealed first to his artistic senses. It was a beautiful group. Then something gripped at his heart.

Why should he not have just such a group belonging to him? He could imagine Marie sitting on the grass with the background of roses, and just such a child lying in her lap. Only she was much more beautiful, there was more dignity about her, more repose. Presently the children began playing at a distance, conscious, with the quick intelligence of children, that when grown-ups met, dullness set in; that they had had their mead of their mother's attention. Eleanor raised her eyes to his.

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"Mr Randolph, what do you think of Marie Prideaux?"

He looked at her—a dazed look. It had never struck him that there could be but one opinion about Marie Prideaux. In his mind she was a remarkable woman, well-bred enough to appeal to the inherent good-breeding in himself, yet with ideas which lifted her above the coil of mind of common mortals; beautiful as a Greek statue; and good, above all things good, with a goodness which was a revelation. He had been too inclined to mix all women up in his mind, to confound Arab maidens with Italian actresses, and the adventuress with British matrons. Woman was to him a rare plant with strange off-shoots. It was the soil in which they were planted, the climate, which nurtured them, that made the difference. He didn't think that there were any bad women; he also was not aware that there were any wonderfully good ones, till he had met Marie. Now he was gradually weeding out the tares, and he was conscious that in weeding—every plant had been destroyed—that Marie stood alone in a field of grace. He was beginning to understand the worship of the Madonna. When he thought of Marie she was always dressed in blue and white.

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He smiled blandly at Mrs Brodrick. To discuss Marie seemed absurd.

"What do I think of her? A very nice woman—charming."

His want of enthusiasm alarmed her. She foresaw trouble for her friend. She was glad she had had the courage to speak. Bob had told her not to, but she never followed him, and always with happy results.

"Is that all?" Her disappointment was written clearly on her face, and he wondered what she had expected him to say. It didn't seem to him that Marie was of the women one discusses. He had never discussed Lucille, except with his lawyers, and then it had not been Lucille that he discussed, but his own inability to conform to married life. To Mr Greene he had said: "Mrs Yelverton is a perfect woman."

"What else do you want me to say?" he asked Mrs Brodrick, now laughing.

"Why, a hundred things; I was in hopes that you had fallen in love with her."

Mrs Brodrick was always audacious; it was her audacity which made her such a good friend. She certainly rushed in, where angels feared to tread, but only as concerned her dearest friends.

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"Doesn't every one fall in love with her?" he asked innocuously.

"We did." Eleanor Brodrick's tone was a little reserved. "I think her the most delightful woman in the world, heads above everybody else, but just for that reason I would not like her to have any worry." She broke off. "I believe," she went on, "that Marie has had some great trouble, and I wouldn't like her to have a fresh one through me."

He laughed, to disguise that he knew what she meant. Then what Lucille had once called his "elephantine sincerity" had stepped in.

"Is any one talking about her?" he asked a little nervously.

"Well, yes, Mr Randolph—Mr Rosford's wife, the vicar's wife, you know. Of course, clergymen's wives are always the worst gossips of all, one knows that, but she asked me whether you were engaged to Marie."

She waited an instant for the bomb to burst, as it were.

And Clifford Yelverton turned his eyes away from her. Instinctively his eyes saw the horizon, where he espied things the others did not, the cloud no bigger than

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a man's hand, but also the first streak of dawn, and the after-glow of twilight.

"Engaged?" he said. "Why, do you mean that they think I am going to marry her?" He laughed, and his laugh was joyous. The normal, the sane, the commonplace were invading his life at last, and he threw open his doors to it, as a peer turned socialist might throw open his doors, which had been shut, closed to all but the illuminated, to the brow-beaten labourer, the begrimed mechanic. "Do you think she would marry me if I asked her? Why, the idea never occurred to me. She seemed so"—he sought for a word—"so impersonal."

"Why, she is head over ears in love with you."

"Heavens!" he took off his hat as though the idea were too much for him.

Then he remembered Lucille.

"If it could be managed." He spoke doubtfully.

"Is there any just cause or impediment?" Mrs Brodrick spoke lightly, and her lightness, frothiness, jarred.

"I don't know," he said nervously. "I don't know." Then gravely he said: "They don't talk in the desert or in the Steppes; how uncivilised we are in England."

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Eleanor Brodrick laughed.

"No doubt we shall get better in time, but meanwhile, it is our feeling of responsibility that has made us one of the greatest countries on earth."

"Yes, I suppose so." He was telling himself that the respectability of the British did not compare with the codes of the Mohammedans, but he realised that it would be out of place to mention this just now. "I should like to think it over," he said pathetically.

"By all means think it over, Mr Randolph; I know that the world is horrid, but still I suppose we must have some regard for *les convenances*. Marie is fearfully devoid of all regard for them, but she has her living to make. Of course, it seems ridiculous that such a woman should depend on honey, but there are people in Lichborough who are quite capable of giving up buying honey, if anything was said, and you know you are dangerously near."

A gleam of humour lit up Clifford Yelverton's eyes.

"I thought that was why you introduced us. You told me to be a good neighbour." His eyes twinkled, and a flush rose to Eleanor Brodrick's face.

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"Yes, I know I did, and that is why I am so worried."

"Worried? Is it as bad as that?" He laughed his scoffing laugh.

"Well, I would hate to see people turn a cold shoulder upon her."

"Good Lord! what have I done?"

His perplexity made Mrs Brodrick laugh.

"You are there every day."

"Yes; mustn't I go every day? What day may I go?"

Mrs Brodrick laughed.

"I know how foolish it must seem to you, and Marie will be furious when she knows I have meddled, but, of course, if everything is all right, if you are going to propose, who—of course nobody, can say a thing; but the question is, are you going to propose? If you are not, you know, you had better drop it."

He laughed at her.

"I wouldn't drop it for worlds; why, her society is nectar to me. There is no woman on earth I respect more." Almost he wiped his brow, mentally he did so. The quaintness of Lichborough, how droll it was.

"Of course you do, every one does, Mr Randolph, but the question is, are you engaged or are you going to propose? They won't stand any half measures in Lichborough, I can

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tell you. Even *I* could not defend Marie, if you were already married, for instance. I can go a long way, but I have my limitations, and I won't see Marie made unhappy."

He had never realised that he was married till to-day.

"I will see what can be done," he said lamely. "Why, of course, I would like to marry her if it can be managed."

CHAPTER XVII

THE question was merely this—could it be managed? He was not quite sure. It would need a visit to Greene & Hastings, and he feared like the devil a visit to the firm. They might see a way out, they might tell him to go and be—he wouldn't even think the word. To let them know, some instinct told him, was to tell the whole world; why the dickens couldn't they leave him to manage his own affairs? What if Lucille wouldn't hear of a divorce? He had gone over to Marie, and told her of his conversation with Eleanor Brodrick. She was as angry as he was.

"I do hope that you are not angry with me, I never imagined——"

"Nor did I, Mr Randolph. Oh, what a wicked place the world is!"

"Not the world," he said, laughing, "England; its sins have to be registered with red tape, and its sins are greater than that of any other nation. No nation on earth has revealed such depths of depravity as

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England; but it loves to issue two editions, simultaneously — its depravity side by side with its safeguarding of morality. Black and white, those should be the colours of England; the red, that is only a narrow line of tape, the streak which is like a blood wound."

Once more the impulse rose in him, to tell her, to place himself in her hands, and then to abide by her decision. Then again something held him back from the confession. For a few days all went as before, and Lucille was in a reckless mood. She didn't care, she told herself, what people said. The worst that could happen would be, if the truth came out—and then who would blame her? But, underlying the bravado, was a vague discomfort she would not acknowledge to herself. What if, after being talked about, after giving her heart to this man, she had been mistaken, not about him—she told herself she did not care who he was, what he had done—but about his feelings for her. Even when he had discussed what Eleanor Brodrick had said, he had not told her that he loved her, and yet she was sure that he did, in his peculiar way, the way which charmed, when he occasionally wooed her as if by accident. Perhaps he could not love deeply, perhaps he could not marry. The mysterious ties of men, she had

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learned of these since her marriage, the strange code of honour of some men, who, while they will not give their names to women who have belonged to them, yet sometimes hold back from inflicting the wound of giving it to some one else. And there might be a wife. If so, the similarity of their fates, how strange it would be. In those days Lucille told herself that if he proposed to her she would accept him regardless of consequences. She realised now that she simply had not cared for George Pennant.

And then one day, when Clifford Yelverton had called, the companion received him and told him that Miss Prideaux was not feeling well, was lying down, that she wanted him to sit in the garden, if he would, but that to-day she could not see him. His face fell. It was so unusual. Was she beginning to realise that the friendship, innocent as it had been, must come to an end? She had made one of her rare visits to London the day before—had this anything to do with it?

He wandered back again to his own house, feeling miserable. How could he ever exist without this woman? It was time that he began doing something—but what? To begin to free himself might mean new fetters. Marie would never agree to his abandoning the wife who was her friend. What a tangle it all was.

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Fiercely the thought gripped him, the wish to take her away, this woman, somewhere far away in the desert, where no one would know. She would come, he thought, she would come.

And it was in very fact, the visit to London, which had caused Lucille to refuse to see him. She must have time to think. She had been obliged to go to London on business, and almost without knowing why she did so, since she had wanted to lose touch with the world, with her friends, she had called at the office where she had directed that letters should be sent her. At first, when she was living in London, she had called for them regularly, and answered them without giving her address. Then, when she had resolved to earn her own living, to start her little garden—her tiny farm, as she called it—she had resolved to leave the letters alone. In time they would give up writing, she thought, and if she kept up a correspondence they would trace her at last; and she wanted to be lost, to lose her own identity, to become one of the unknown, to forget all about herself as Lucille Yelverton, to begin again.

But to-day, as she had passed the place, something had impelled her to enter, to ask for her letters. There were several bearing postmarks many months old. One was dated

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a year ago. The man looked at her, surprised, as; after a long search, he handed them to her.

Two were from George Pennant, reproaching her, and there was one from Greene and Hastings about investments; there were three from Rita Lancaster, hurt, offended; and there were others of minor importance. The one which held her, made her cry out as she read it, was the one from Mrs Lancaster, from the Pyrenees.

He was alive, this man, alive, yes, the Danfords knew him too well to be mistaken. The thought dazed her, and filled her neither with joy nor with sorrow. Presently she would realise what it meant, but all the way home it seemed to her that she could not think. Then she had shut herself up in her room, while the habit of years seemed to voice that she had her wish at last, the while something else complained and groaned. He was alive. It could be no other man. And it was like him to stay with the peasants. "The only aristocrats in the world," he had once said. "The dignity of the soil is far greater than the dignity of office, of title, of wealth." One year ago, he had been alive, he had returned to Europe. Now, what would his next move be?

Then, thinking calmly over the situation,

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seated near her window, her eyes fell on the slouching figure of William Randolph, walking disconsolately back to his dreary home. A great tenderness welled up within her at the sight of this man who was, like herself, repudiated by love, so it seemed to her.

Something insistent awoke. She could not let him go. Clifford Yelverton might return at any moment now, but he had come too late. . . . When she thought of what she would do if he returned, she could not go on thinking. If he returned, and did not want her, she might divorce him; but she had always hated the idea of divorce, despised it: and it would not be an honest divorce, it would be trumped up, unworthy, yet if she did not—— Oh, she could not stand it!

Then another picture presented itself to her vision—what if he came appealing, tender, broken, sad, lonely, and asked her to take him back; reminded her of her message which she had sent, which perhaps he had received. What then? What then?

At this juncture she told herself that he had come too late, that she would have the right to send him away, to demand her freedom. The fact that he was now Lord Traverty did not influence her; she did not care. It had been the man who had fascinated

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her. Now, to-day, she told herself that her love for him was dead, that a new love, vital, impelling—the real thing—burned now in her heart, consumed her, and that she no longer wanted him, Clifford Yelverton, back. She never wanted to see him again. Yes, even if this man Randolph, did not care for her, would never marry her, she wanted to be free to think of him, to see him, to comfort him, to care for him.

Once or twice she rose from her chair and paced the room, then stood still and gazed out on to his house, the house of the man she loved, which stood higher than hers on the slope of the hill.

Oh! if only she could know what he thought, how much easier it would be. If he had told her, so that she could put the case before him, ask his advice—the advice he gave so grudgingly, almost awkwardly, and which was yet always so clear, so wise. If he had told her that he cared for her, that he wanted to marry her, together, they might have devised means, devised means for getting free of Clifford Yelverton. But his silence—his silence, which spoke so eloquently to her heart, the while he uttered no words she could act upon—made it impossible for her to tell him who she was, to ask him what she should do.

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And the while she mused, and at first harboured a resolve, then rejected it, she was unconscious, that underlying all the superstructure of tortured doubt, lay an inherent nobility which recoiled from deserting Clifford in the hour of need, if the hour of need had arrived: and something whispered that his hour of need was close at hand, that it was proof that he was weary, that he had come closer to civilisation, and something told her that he had pretended that he was another man for her sake, that now he could never appear again unless the whole story was told to the world. Her whole being shrank from its being known; the old pride had revived. As she went to sleep that night, exhausted with her thoughts, she asked herself if it would be possible to stick to the line of duty she had mapped out for herself, to receive Clifford and be kind to him, to push the other man out of her thoughts. It was cruel of fate to have placed him in her path at the eleventh hour, simply to taunt her. Then, when she awoke in the morning, refreshed, with a saner, cooler point of view, she told herself that, after all, nothing was changed—that she had always fancied that Clifford was alive somewhere, and that since William Randolph had not spoken it did not matter.

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With something of the old method, the old regularity, which had never quite deserted her, the while her mind had broadened, she set about her duties, and gathered bees together in handfuls with gloved hands, and placed them in other hives.

Only when, later, Clifford came to see her, there was a new hesitancy in his manner, a new reserve in hers.

The thoughts of the preceding day, the night, had been dominating thoughts with both of them. Both were conscious of an impending crisis, of a new turn in the road, the end of which neither could discern, which filled them both at once with elation and despair, yet which held in it the elements of ultimate triumph, of optimism.

Both told themselves that they were not children, the while they were beginning to live for the first time.

He did not ask her if she were better, what was the matter; he knew that something new had entered her life, that she wanted to be alone. There had been a time when he, too, craved for solitude, now he hated solitude, loathed it. And he had been afraid of some decision on her part which would prevent his coming again. He, too, had taken time for reflection. Something had to be done. He

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must tell her that there was a reason for his silence, or he would lose her, yet he dreaded to tell her lest he should lose her the sooner. When she knew that he was her friend's husband, she would send him away. And yet nothing could make him go back to Lucille, nothing.

But the very reserve in her, brought out more tenderness; he was more occupied with the woman now, with her thoughts, than with circumstances. Once he wondered if she had heard anything. He longed to find out if she had seen any one.

And then one day the maid had announced George Pennant—

George Pennant, who had traced her to her lair, and who stood smiling, triumphant, in the doorway.

Her heart stood still. She admired his audacity, but she was frightened. Out there in the garden was William Randolph; they must not meet. She invited him with some alacrity into her little drawing-room, then she went to the foot of the stairs and called Holo, and whispered, William Randolph must be got rid of, or he would find out who she was. George Pennant had asked discreetly for Miss Prideaux, but he would forget in conversation; already he had exclaimed:

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"Mrs Yelverton!" And she had held her fingers to her lips, and smiling, whispered: "Sh."

Then, as he seated himself on a chair, she asked him how he had found her. She felt ashamed—ashamed of his love which she could never return; ashamed of having run away from him in order to be alone, while the man stood outside whom she saw every day, whom she loved.

And Mr Pennant thought he had never seen her so beautiful. The open air life suited her; her colour was glorious, and there was a new look which puzzled him. For one moment he took it to be pleasure at seeing him; then, gradually, the conceit died down.

"Surely, now, you are going to give this farce up?"

"What farce?" Mischievously, she assumed an innocence she did not feel.

"Oh, all this."

The wave of his hand embraced the house, the garden, the circumstances. "This bread-winning business, this solitude."

Lucille blushed.

"I love the work," she said, "and I am never alone." She told him of the Brodricks, of the friends she had made.

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"Then you were simply tired of your old friends." His voice was hurt.

"No, but I wanted to think."

"Haven't you done thinking yet?"

"Oh dear no, I've only just begun."

She told him of Mrs Lancaster's letter, and found that he knew. His face brought back the old associations; she talked as she had always talked about Clifford Yelverton.

And Mr Pennant had news for her.

"I hear he is in England," he said. "A man saw him a few days ago walking near here, and told a friend of mine. He said he could swear that it was he. I expect he is in the neighbourhood, looking for you."

She turned very pale.

"Looking for me?"

Her voice sounded dry and hard; he could not tell if it was from emotion or fear.

"I thought you had better know, for he may find you out as I have, and come to see you." Then changing his tone: "Do you mean to say," he asked earnestly, "that you are going to take him back? Have you still not changed your mind?"

She looked away from him, at the swaying trees, which seemed to move in time to her thoughts, musing, warily itemising life.

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"Oh, I don't know," she said; "I don't know what to do."

"He had no right to come back," he said almost fiercely.

"Oh, don't say that." She was thinking of Clifford, wondering what had brought him close to her.

"The only decent thing he could have done was to die."

"Oh, how awful to say that."

"Well, or, at least, to have his death put in the papers."

"What good would that do?"

She, her thinking was of Randolph, of his silence. What good would his death be if William Randolph was always going to be silent? The perplexity of it all confused her, while something like physical pain struggled far away, somewhere.

"Why, you would be free."

"And what should I do with my freedom?"

He stopped and looked into her eyes.

"We could marry," he said. And the boyishness, the joy, the love-light in his eyes pained her. Once, she had told him that if she were free, there would be no other man. He fancied that she had gone away for his sake, for hers, afraid.

"Now that he has come back, you don't

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want him, do you? He has come too late; you will take steps." He spoke feverishly, with conviction.

"Yes, he has come too late," she murmured, "too late, but——"

He looked up, startled, and the expression on his face startled her. Then she told him that she had fallen in love, that she no longer wanted Clifford, nor him, George Pennant, that there was only one man she wanted.

For an instant his head went round, then he stood up.

"If I can do anything——" He spoke hoarsely.

She held out her two hands to him. "You can forgive me," she said; "ah, think of what my life has been." Her voice, her gesture, appealed to be allowed to be happy, not to be made to regret anything, who had spent such long years of regrets, of waiting.

"I hope that you will always be happy." He spoke like one in a dream.

Then he passed out of the door and walked down the garden path. Near the gate he almost knocked against a tall, sprawling figure. Both half-raised their hats, and their eyes met.

"Beg pardon," Clifford muttered.

But George Pennant could not take his eyes off him. Then he started through the gate at

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a rapid pace, mystified. It was not till the train reached London that he burst out laughing. An old gentleman, seated in the further corner, thought he had gone mad, and was thankful that the journey was at an end.

He was still laughing when he hailed a hansom. He told Rita Lancaster and Mrs Danford that just what they had said had come to pass. Clifford and his wife were having a new honeymoon, and didn't want to be disturbed. Then he told what Lucille had said.

Rita Lancaster couldn't understand it. It was so unlike her to pretend, not to be sincere, to play a part.

Mrs Danford looked at George Pennant.

"Do you think that it is possible, after all these years—she was such a child. And he, you say, he has a beard——"

"Is it possible, do you think, that she doesn't know?"

CHAPTER XVIII

It was what Marie told Mr Randolph of George Pennant's visit that caused him to make up his mind to speak to her. Something in the personality of the man who had knocked against him, then stared at him, mystified, perplexed, had alarmed him. He rarely asked questions, but to-day his curiosity pierced.

"A new purchaser?" he asked with ill-assumed indifference, so ill-assumed that Lucille felt sure that the crucial moment had arrived.

"No, an old friend."

"I thought nobody knew where you were?"

"I thought so, hoped so; but he saw me in London and followed me—very mean of him."

"I suppose he had something very important to say." He laughed uncomfortably; he had premonitions.

Lucille's "ye-s" sought his ear quickly. A sudden, unexpected thought came to her.

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Did he know her story? Did he know who she was? Was that why he was silent? No, she didn't believe that he knew, he was too disingenuous, too sincere, too careless; he would have betrayed the knowledge.

"Yes," she sighed, "he brought me some news."

"Horrid news, I suppose." He spoke as one who knows what it is to receive the wrong kind of news; had he not tried all his life to avoid receiving news of any kind? had it not been the small, disagreeable things which Lucille announced in her child's voice that had irritated him with her?

Now, to-day, he could see by her face that she had received a shock. He was beginning to read her face. He had never before studied that of any woman.

"Yes, he told me something very remarkable; something which I once wanted to happen, has happened to-day, when I no longer want it."

"That is always the way." He laughed, as if he were in league with fate when it played tricks with life, with the humans; as if he understood Nature's sense of humour.

"And——" she broke off. It had become her habit to confide in him. To-day it seemed to her that she must divert his

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attention. "And he wants me to marry him, if——" She broke off again. He remembered that Lucille had had that habit of breaking off. With her, it had irritated, but with this woman he rather liked it. It seemed to emphasise what she said afterwards, as if she stopped to listen to her own thoughts before pronouncing them. He wondered if all women had that habit.

"If——?" He looked at her, and for the first time his look disconcerted her.

"If I marry anybody," she said.

He looked at her anxiously.

"Did you think of marrying anybody?"

He spoke as if at any moment she might do this thing, just whenever she took it into her head. He spoke as if she might walk off at any moment, and go into a church and be married. Dimly, for his thoughts, the minor ones, were often hazy, he foresaw that it would be a terrible thing for him if she did so. He had thought that she was content to glide along as she was. The restlessness of the human, was a thing he could never understand or take into account, that restlessness without which there would be no drama in life, no tragedy, no achievement, but which, when it is goalless, means unrest, longing, discomfort, melancholy. The

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onrushing of the soul, the heart, the mind, even in a passive body—these things he had not noticed, whose eyes were always fastened on the horizon, the while his feet stumbled in rabbit's holes, and crushed insects.

"I have thought about it a great deal." She was smiling now; girlish shame would be out of keeping now, at her age, she told herself. She spoke with some of the assertiveness of a married woman. "But it needs two, you know, and so far I have been alone. Now, to-day, I had to think about it when he asked me, but—he isn't the kind of man."

He was glad that she wasn't going to marry that man—any man. Presently he began to wonder if her words had been an invitation to him to ask her to marry him. He would lose her, perhaps, if he didn't, and yet to ask her, meant to tell her, and to tell her was either to lose her or to raise a hundred worries, a hundred problems to be launched into all the confusion which had been his aim all through life to keep out of: it might mean to have to return to Lucille. She was waiting, she had sent word, waiting, and Marie had told him that she was not married, not even engaged.

All the day he avoided looking at her, as

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if she could read his secret there. And instinctively she felt that he was, so to speak, beating his wings, that presently he would flutter and fall at her feet, and it would lie with her whether she picked him up or let him lie there unnoticed, bruised.

Presently he would speak, and then the upheaval would begin; the upheaval, the storm which must needs come, before the air cleared, the upheaval which she dreaded, but which would enable her to see clearly.

All day, and far into the night she pondered over what George Pennant had told her. Why, she wondered, was Clifford Yelverton looking for her? And she was conscious that he was acting up to his confidence in her. She had promised to be waiting; then she had telegraphed him to come. And she, how base a part she was playing; she had run away from him, made it impossible for him to trace her—fooled him. It was in vain that she told herself that she had a right to be angry. She had chosen the path of magnificence, and it was too late now to act as other women would. And then another thought came to her: supposing that nothing prevented William Randolph from marrying her, would he blame her when he knew, tell her that she ought not to have allowed him to

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love. her, to grow to care ; that she ought to have sent him away? The thought made her cheeks tingle. The wrath, the anger of William Randolph, how scathing they would be ; she did not think she could bear it. Then she laughed to herself.

He was not the kind of man to grow angry, to blame ; the caprices of the human he treated with tolerant amusement. Women ! He looked upon them all, as inconsequent beings, the victims of their own folly, a folly which had been implanted in them for the pleasure of some kind of men.

"How well I understand him," she said, with a touch of self-satisfied conceit, while she wondered whether, if she met Clifford now, she would understand him also. It seemed to her that all these years she had been studying the character of men, just because she had discovered her ignorance of it, received the bitter lesson, the punishment of ignorance, which is far more severe than the punishment of crime. Now it seemed to her that she was a sibyl of men's thoughts.

And during that day she spoke to him very little, and busied herself with her commerce of honey, trying experiments, leaving him to his own devices. He must tell her to-day, she said to herself, she could not go on like

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this, and, according to what he said, she would act; he must help her, if it was only to confess.

It was much later in the evening, a stilly night, across which at intervals a breeze blew quickly, then died down again, as if it essayed to speak, and couldn't, or no one would listen to it, that he came and sat closer than usual. Once he touched the hand lightly, that lay closest to him, clasping the arm of the low straw chair, as she lay back, her eyes trying to pierce the dark, interlaced foliage above, as her mind tried to pierce the future. She was glad that a star presently began to twinkle through the branches, to wink at her in a hopeful manner.

"You have a beautiful hand," he said.

It was the first direct compliment he had ever paid her. All the others had been dropped by accident, or wrung from him by utterances of her own, to which she invited his contradiction.

"Do you think so?"

She held it out to him spontaneously.

He clasped it in his own; the skin was soft, but the clasp strong; true, inspiring courage. He bent, and raised it to his lips. The feeling of a woman's warm, tender hand, how delicious it was after all

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these years. Inwardly he laughed at the thought of how rarely he had held one in his own; but a new chrism was upon him—the chrism of love.

He leaned forward and tried to seek the shadow of her eyes.

“Have you ever thought, when you were thinking of marriage, whether you could marry me?”

There was a moment's silence, while her heart beat quickly. How rapidly the crisis had come. It was like a sudden, painless death.

Then she laughed happily.

“Indeed I have; haven't I often thought how nice it would be?” Her audacity charmed him, the while it took his breath away. “You never said anything that——”

“I didn't propose, do you mean? But I should have soon.”

“You were such an awful time.”

“Do you mean it?” He drew closer.

The new sensation, he told himself, beat all the emotion, all the sunsets, and all the crystal glacier peaks in the world. People weren't such fools after all, he told himself, the while he smiled mentally at the way Nature, life, had trapped him again.

The first love of a man of forty, how intense it is, how ambient, for all the derision

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of boy's passion still lingers, yet is beginning to merge into tenderness, into friendship. This time he must grapple with fate, with happiness — hold it. Then he sat back again, and took up the cigar he had laid down.

What about Lucille? It seemed to him that she called him by name, that she was standing there at the foot of the lawn waiting for him, wondering why he was so long. And, while he sat and puffed away in silence, given over to musing, she, too, was silent. She was telling herself that now that he had spoken, she would know what to do. By some means she would get rid of Clifford; she would find him at once, tell him, and bid him go. He deserved it, she told herself, trying to harden her heart, he deserved it. He had come too late.

And twenty times the lips of William Randolph moved to utter something, and twenty times they closed on silence, while strange thoughts of which he had never thought himself capable, coursed each other down the corridor of his mind, and seemed to slam doors at the end. -He would never tell her. He would marry her as William Randolph, and remain William Randolph to the end; she must never know.

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The thought frightened him : he had never been secretive, never been insincere.

But a new craving was upon him, the craving for happiness, for companionship, and that companion, a woman. All the horrors that would follow a revelation, perhaps her recoil, her repudiation of himself, all that he could not bear. He always hated noise, confusion, trouble. He shirked the effort of life, and had glided instead, floating with the stream. There was nothing of the mast, the helm, about him. Capable of commanding, he had allowed himself to be driven. When he wouldn't be bullied any more, he went away. To-day, he told himself, there would be no subterfuge. She must go away with him somewhere, to the ends of the earth. He would have his death announced in the papers, and Lucille could marry again. His title! he had forgotten all about that. His fortune! he would have liked to have had that to give to Marie, but that couldn't be helped. They two were not going to live conventional lives. They needed each other, that was enough, and he had all that was necessary. The enormity of the crime did not enter into his calculation. If Marie had been any other kind of woman he would have suggested that she simply come away

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with him. Conscious of his own sense of honour, he told himself that a woman to whom he was not married, would have a stronger hold upon him than any other. If the story of Adam and Eve were true, they had been held together by the superior contract of faithful devotion, not by the marriage service. But Marie would not consent to this, he knew, and he delighted in her virtue. So a woman ought to be.

Presently, following his train of thought, he remarked:

"I like the way some Americans marry: merely walk over to a church and marry without a fuss, just call in on their road of happiness, as it were."

And she, yes, she thought that under the circumstances it would be better to do it in that way. It was so like him, a part of the whole adventure, the mystery, which clung to them both, and which neither quite owned, nor cared to know.

"Two people, dropped from Mars," he said, laughing; and the name of "Mars" evoked something from long ago.

"Two people pandering to the whims of another planet, and going to church, and then——"

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And then she said: "Then going back to Mars."

His words chilled her. They reminded her of Clifford Yelverton, and she wanted to forget him. She felt guilty when she thought of him.

"I thought Mars had gone out, been extinguished."

"You are thinking of the moon," he said, "the crystal moon, with the transparent mind and the dead heart—the moon, who still smiles like a Cheshire cat. The smile was launched on the earth when her heart was dying, and it has hung there ever since. It is the ghost of a smile."

She turned and looked at him in the darkness. His words thrilled and frightened her. Some one, a man long ago, had spoken like that, and now, as then, it fascinated her, yet awed her, reminded her of Hans Andersen.

"Shall we go to-morrow?" he asked.

"To-morrow! Oh, not quite so soon as that."

"You are not going to get clothes?"

He spoke with a species of dread—this woman must not do as other women did.

"Oh dear no, I have no money; and my clothes, well—if you are satisfied."

"I will deck you with flowers," he whispered. Now he lowered his voice, and spoke half-passionately, half-dreamily. His voice re-

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minded her of descriptions she had read of the wind stroking the bosom of the desert. He spoke like an Oriental. So might an Arab woo his bride beneath some primeval oasis, in the midst of a great silence, in some glade, where pampas grass grew, and tall, swaying palms, and where strange shrubs gleamed in a vivid moonlight that was almost hot.

Once more the vague discomfort, the fascination of years ago, held her enthralled and terrified.

CHAPTER XIX

AND the morning found him still insisting on his own silence, urging his own mind to secrecy, to subterfuge. There was something of feverish haste now, in the way he urged her to marry him. They would go to London, and be married by special licence. Why—why since he had allowed her freedom and wealth, should Lucille grudge him a little happiness? They could be happy, these two, without knowing of each other's past. Happiness! they couldn't find the happiness they sought in the peerage. With money, they wanted the least possible to do with it. They were in perfect harmony with each other, understood each other, and were weary. They would rest together.

She, he, had been disillusioned by the past: each was silent, reticent, yet each believed in the other and could trust. To them, situated as they were, it seemed the only possible thing. It would be a farce, Lucille told herself, to go to church; yes, something of his creeds had

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fastened themselves upon her. The ~~real~~ marriage was fidelity, and, while neither knew about the other, each felt that the other would not be bound by the forms of the church alone. It was a risk, an awful risk, Lucille told herself, but what if she never found her husband, Clifford; what if she did, and he wanted her. Oh, no, her patience was exhausted, she wanted to be happy; and Randolph, he, too, was weary, and it seemed that the world repudiated them both.

She had fixed on the following Thursday to be married to William Randolph, and now, at the last minute, she was afraid. It was an awful thing that she was doing. She wished that Rita Lancaster had never written to her, that George Pennant had never come to tell her, then she could have pretended to herself that she did not know. She was about to commit a crime. She could not do it. The habit of years, she could not shake it off—the habit of self-restraint, of patience, a practice of fidelity which had become part of the fibre of her life. She must tell William Randolph, she must tell him, and something whispered that he would recoil before the trouble of it all.

And on the Wednesday evening she told him that she could not make up her mind,

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and he felt as if he had been swept by a devastating wind. Presently, the world would know who he was, and then she would not follow him. On the Thursday on which they were to have been married, to have gone to London, both conscious that they were mocking God by the act, yet both thirsting for the happiness which had never been theirs, William Randolph received a packet, and the handwriting on the outside, although it spelt his new name, reminded him of something, of somebody. He would not open it, he told himself, with the old desire to shirk trouble strong upon him. He had enough to think about to-day. The marriage licence lay in the drawer of his writing-table, yet she had backed out at the last minute.

She could not do this thing, she told herself, could not. She must tell him, and if he did not recoil they would have to set the law in motion to try to get the marriage annulled, to do something; they would have to wait.

There were things, she had told him, which he ought to know, and he had said: "What is the good of knowing the past. With that we have nothing to do, only with the future." He had felt convinced that

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she had not much to tell, nothing ~~very~~ grave on her conscience, and women always exaggerated tragedy, made mountains out of mole-hills. It was their way of sowing wild oats, of culling emotion from the wayside.

"And if ever you found out anything, anything I ought to have told you, you would not reproach me?"

"Reproach you?"

His confidence, his trust, touched her, but then he did not know. And presently, with a premonition of evil, Clifford Yelverton opened the sealed packet which had been registered.

It was from Greene & Hastings, and they enclosed letters which had been returned to them from different parts of the world after the advertisement had appeared, and amongst other things was Lucille's cablegram—"Come back at once. I want you."

It was a good thing, he told himself, that they were not to be married to-day, he and Marie. He felt too disturbed. It was a thousand pities that they had not been married days ago before he received it. Now something seemed to chain him again, to impede his liberty of action.

The letter from Greene & Hastings irritated him also.

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"We do not wish to interfere with your movements," they wrote, and he laughed scoffingly at the way they protested against just what they were doing. "We understand that you have changed your name and are living at Lichborough. For this reason we address this letter to the name we understand you have adopted. At the same time you must forgive us if we take the liberty as your legal advisers to point out that the present situation is apt to become complicated. While you were abroad we could deal more easily with your wish to remain unknown, now, at any moment, you are liable to be seen, and the heir might hear of it. Are we to understand that you have no wish to claim your title, or to repossess yourself of your estates? In that case it would be much more satisfactory if you would deed them over to the present heir."

An oath, an Arabic oath, wishing Greene and Hastings' grandmother to the devil, and his off-spring to hell, rolled beneath the gold-grey wave of Clifford Yelverton's moustache.

"We must also advise you that several sums are lying uninvested which are not obliged to be included in the estate, and which Mrs Yelverton had refused to appropriate. We

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would be glad of your instructions in this matter.

"While continuing to keep our promise of secrecy, we once more claim the right of a firm which has for years advised yourself, and your father and grandfather before you, to urge a reconciliation with Mrs Yelverton. I need not point out to you how her life has been ruined by her fidelity and devotion, but we would remind you that in the event of her finding out that you have returned to this country without notifying her, or taking steps to set her free, she will be greatly pained, and perhaps less inclined to look upon the situation with leniency. We are, of course, speaking without knowledge, as we have not seen her or heard from her for over two years. We take this opportunity to enclose a cablegram which was addressed to you some time ago. We do not know the necessity which prompted the cablegram.

"It may be, of course, that you are dealing with the complicated situation yourself, in order to simplify it, and we shall await with impatience your instructions on matters generally.—Very faithfully yours,

"GREENE & HASTINGS."

"They seem to be pretty well acquainted with my business," he said to himself, the while he anathematised all lawyers, and

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Greene & Hastings in particular, calling them blasted, meddling fools.

There was only one thing to do : to persuade Marie to marry him off-hand, and to go away again abroad.

The letter had agitated him more than he knew. It haunted him for days, and something of the same restlessness, which had possessed itself of him, was noticeable in Marie Prideaux.

In vain he urged her to make up her mind. For the first time she pleaded that they knew nothing of each other.

"You don't know me, I don't know you," she said wearily.

"I thought that our ignorance of each other was the very essence of our trust." He spoke reproachfully. If she began to probe there would be an end of everything.

He did not answer the lawyer's letter.

A few days later, Marie met him in the morning on the lawn, looking radiant, and dressed in a simple, but very becoming, white gown. She laid her two hands in his.

"Any day next week," she said, "that you like." But she did not tell him that the reason she was ready, was because she had seen in the papers that she was free, that Lord Traverty had died in South Africa a

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few weeks ago. She was free—free as air—and she could even tell him her story. No sentiment dictated to her that she must mourn for six months—wear black. She had mourned for over twelve years, she told herself. She had imagined herself a widow twenty times; now, at last, she was a widow indeed, and instead of feeling like one, she was about to become a bride. The relief left no room for regret, only it seemed to her that her fidelity had been wasted, yet not wasted, since without it she would never have met William Randolph. She might even have married George Pennant.

One impulse seized her to write and tell her friends—to announce her forthcoming marriage. They must have seen the announcement. They would understand. Later, looking back on those days, she could never account for the instinct which held her back from telling any one.

That morning—the morning of the day when at breakfast she had seen the announcement of her husband's death in the *Times*—she had begun to tell him.

"As a matter of fact, dear, I was not wholly free. My conscience troubled me. Now, to-day, there is nothing that can come between us. Shall I tell you the whole

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story?" Her face radiated with innocence. She knew that her story could bear the telling, that she needn't blame herself, that there was nothing to regret. But he stopped her. If she began confidences she might require some in return, and the poem would come to an abrupt ending, a dissonant chord would crash down on the hidden music of their lives.

"No, no! don't tell me. It is the not knowing that is the charm." He spoke impetuously, and his trust bewitched her. Perhaps—who could tell?—the shadow of the departed husband would raise darkness between them. He had known Yelverton, he had told her, and she could imagine that as a widow—the widow of a well-known man—she would offer a different presentment to the "Princess of the Honeycomb," the lonely woman given over to solitude in a flower-embowered cottage with an old companion. Yes, one chapter of her life was closed; it would be better not to reopen it. When she was Mrs Randolph she could tell her friends—tell him. One day—one day when they were in the mood for confidences. She had one impulse: to go and see the lawyers—to ask them what they knew—to tell them of the approaching marriage. They had been

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good to her, and Lucille possessed that rare gift of gratitude. But just now she was in a haze of dreamy joy; the load—the cloud of years—seemed to be lifted, and she was going to be happy—to make him happy—the man who sometimes looked so wistful, as if he had been forgotten by life. Later, she would tell him quietly when they both began to awaken from the dream, and then would be time to show all those she had seemed to turn from, that she still cared for them.

But it was George Pennant who wondered most at the news the papers contained. It was impossible, he said, that he should have died in South Africa, when he had seen him in her garden a few weeks ago. They were fooling the world—their friends; she was giving in to some whim of his, or both were ashamed.

“Why, their reconciliation seems quite improper,” Mrs Danford remarked.

But Rita Lancaster made no comment. It was all so unlike Lucille.

Lady Macfarlane was hurt and mystified. She had tried to find out Lucille’s address, but the Danfords and George Pennant had pretended not to know.

It was some little comfort to Mr Pennant

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to know that it was her own husband who was his rival, though he wondered how she could forgive the man. Brutality seemed to pay with women, he told himself savagely.

But Lady Macfarlane was puzzled. Somewhere her poor little sister-in-law was eating her heart out with grief, she told herself, and it was so strange that she had not written to her, come to her, when she heard of his death. Sometimes she wondered, if she were in Europe, masquerading as a sick nurse, or helping the poor, or teaching. Greene & Hastings could tell her nothing.

Her brother's death affected Lady Macfarlane less than her anxiety about Lucille. Now she ought to take her position as his widow. The day that the death was announced, the fact of his title being mentioned proved that he knew of his uncle's death. Why, then, had he never communicated with anybody, never come back to claim the title? Lucille was the dowager Lady Traverty—how absurd at her age to be a dowager; but Lady Macfarlane liked the conventionalities, and she knew that there was a dower-house and fifteen hundred a year, which belonged to Lucille by right. Surely now she need not scruple to take them.

Nobody but Eleanor Brodrick, who knew

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of the engagement, was in the secret, and the town of Lichborough, which was hurt, offended, at not having been informed, took any interest in the announcement that Mr Randolph of the Hermitage, Lichborough, had married, by special licence, at St George's, Hanover Square, Miss Marie Prideaux of Sweetbriar Cottage.

The late tribute to respectability made the cronies talk more, than if she had run away with him unmarried.

"If they weren't engaged they ought to have been," they said viciously.

"Don't you think that you ought to know something more about him?" Eleanor Brod-rick had asked a little anxiously, remembering that she had introduced them; and under the promise of secrecy Lucille had told her who she was.

"My dear!" The story took her breath away, and she could only repeat: "My dear!" Her own discrimination, her own perspicuity, filled her with admiration for herself.

"And to think of your working here for a living; why, it's all too wonderful." Then, in a serious tone: "But, my dear, doesn't it seem all the more necessary that you should

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find out something about this man. Why, it's just on the cards that he is your husband."

Ducille gave her an indescribable look.

"Do you know," she said in an awe-struck voice, "that idea flashed across me once. But oh, no! this man isn't at all like him except sometimes in the things he says, but he is so different, so devoted; but I believe it is something that is like, that first drew me to him. Do you remember that first night when I met him at your house? Doesn't it seem a long time ago now? Well, that night I seemed to remember everything so clearly. There was something in the ring of his voice, I don't know what it was, but I couldn't play, I felt so upset." Then, in the mood for confidences, she told Eleanor Brodrick how near she had been to marrying him after she had heard from George Pennant that he was alive.

"One could forgive you anything," Eleanor Brodrick said, "after all you have gone through. It doesn't sound very kind, but I am glad that he is dead."

"Dead! and Mr Pennant said he had been seen in Lichborough; doesn't it just show what people will say, how they invent things?"

Eleanor Brodrick went away, musing, and

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that night she sent her husband into fits of laughter by telling him that she wouldn't be at all surprised if Lucille were marrying ~~her~~ own husband.

"I never heard anything so immoral in my life," he said. "I always felt that we should be mixed up in some scandal when we took up two strangers with no introduction but their own personality."

"I have a good mind to write to her and address it 'Lady Traverty,' when they are on the honeymoon," Eleanor Brodrick said mischievously.

But the next day she attended the quiet wedding in London, and Lucille, looking proud and radiant, whispered to her at parting: "Remember, dear, that you have promised not to tell a soul."

"I wish I hadn't," Eleanor replied wistfully. "One doesn't get such a chance once in a lifetime. No novel comes up to it." Then, nodding towards Yelverton, who was waiting patiently at the door of the church, looking decidedly uncomfortable, frightened almost, as Eleanor told her husband afterwards, she whispered: "I don't care what you say, Marie, I shall always call him Lord Traverty."

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A shadow passed over Lucille's face, and she looked reproachful.

“He is dead, dear, we mustn't joke about it, and please remember to call me Marie when you write.”

CHAPTER XX

BUT the honeymoon had not been such a success as Lucille had anticipated, and something of the vague discomforts, the sense of powerlessness in the face of the unforeseen, the intangible, which had brought distress in the days of her first married life, re-entered her being. She did not know how much her first married life influenced her being. She had thought to deal with men with subtler methods, had hoped to find the rest of a full understanding, of a love that needed no watering to keep it refreshed, no weeding and hoeing and fatigue. And William Randolph was fitful and moody, taciturn at times, as Clifford had been, given over to musings which shadowed his face. And she began to wonder if all men were alike, if there was no real completeness in companionship.

And there were other things which startled her, which brought back the vague uneasiness of twelve years ago. The same longing for solitude invaded him, as she had been conscious

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of when she had been but a child. Only this time she dealt with it differently. When he rose and wandered on to the balcony, she rose too, and slipped on a wrapper, and went out and sat by his side in silence. She did not cry or distress him as the child-wife had. Instead, she, too, seemed enwrapped in the glory of the night—the eloquent, sublime glory of hushed things, which have ceased to utter, to shriek, which only exhale. She did not know that it was the awakening of his soul which troubled him—the soul which had been mortgaged to Nature, and which to-day had released itself, and sought to influence his nearer self, to bring it down to the minor things which belong to this life, and which had never interested him before. He was in love, deeply in love, with Marie: she had been a revelation of womanhood, and the flesh satisfied, brought a rest of body, which gave an innings to the mind, to the soul. And there was unrest now, in the soul, the soul which is always striving to walk hand in hand with the body, the while the humans frustrate it at every turn, and bring disorder, upset the machinery of God, so that one wire works independently of the other, and jars. He had thought to seek the normal—the normal, the healthy, the sane—to be as other men, and something

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within, whispered that he had done wrong. The beauty, the sincerity, the purity of the woman he now called wife, seemed to throw a flash-light on his mind, and to reveal things crooked, which he was afraid for her to see.

The memory of Lucille, the child-wife, why did it rise up so often now, in the presence of the other woman? And silently, persistently, as spring works diligently beneath the snows of winter, the spirit strove to give him the courage for a confession, even if the confession brought disaster.

And there were other things which brought back the memory of Lucille. Once, when Marie lay in his arms, his head had bruised itself against something hard, sharp-edged, and he had asked her what it was.

She laughed ; then a shadow passed over her face.

"Look." She unpinned something from her throat. "I always wear this," she said, fumbling among the laces and frills of her night-dress. She held out a small black thing to him, which looked like an insect. He held it to the light, and there was a long silence. It was a scarabé of Egypt, one of the few genuine ones he had seen ; and on it words were inscribed which he could decipher, which he had deciphered before. He had been told

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that it had been found on the heart of a daughter of Pharaoh and he had given it to Lucille.

"Where did you get this?"

As he asked her, a thousand memories danced around him, lighting up his mind as though with tiny flames which burned and tingled.

"It was given to me a long time ago by a man—a man who cared for me—and I have worn it every night. He told me that it had been found in a mummy, on the heart of an Egyptian princess; and, I suppose it is a morbid idea, but I have always liked the thought. It has seemed to make a link between me and the woman of long ago—a link with the ancients."

His face was so solemn that she hastened to add: "But if you don't like it, I won't wear it; it isn't very pretty."

"It is a good one—perfect," he muttered absently.

Then one day she had dropped her handkerchief beneath the table of the dining-room of the hotel, and she had asked him to fetch it.

"It isn't this, is it?" He had brought her the only one there.

"Yes, that's it." She held out her hand for the diaphanous piece of batiste.

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He looked at her, dazed for a moment. "I thought it was somebody else's initials."

She took the corner of the handkerchief and examined it. It was one of the few that had survived from the purchase of two years ago.

"L. Y." The letters embroidered in the corner looked like handwriting on the wall—two silent nemesises, witnessing past things, betraying secrets, inanimately threatening disaster from lifelessness.

She laughed.

"Yes, that's mine." A species of recklessness inspired her laughter. Should she tell him? "Those used to be my initials once. You know I told you that you must expect revelations." But he did not stay to hear. He was disturbed, and he passed through the room, and out on to the balcony.

Who had she been, this woman, who yet seemed so genuine? Yet the thought that there was a mystery comforted him. Why should he confess while she was silent? Only the spirit within whispered that she had nothing grave to confess, the while it voiced that if he told her she would be filled with horror at his duplicity, that her whole being would recoil beneath the revelation of her position, which a confession would bring about.

Once or twice in the night he would awake

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with a groan, as the thought came to him of the horror it would be to Marie to find that, legally, she was only his mistress. Would all his love, his tenderness, ever atone? he asked himself. The while he acknowledged to himself, that the secret that lay between them prevented him giving her full tenderness, full and untrammelled devotion. The way the troubles of life had seized hold on him terrified him. He had forgotten all about the sunsets on the ice glaciers, the rainbow of colours which seemed to be throwing flaming, many-coloured ribbons from sky to earth. To-day a passion for the normal obsessed him, and he recognised, without acknowledging it, that he was defeated, that only the straight, prosaic path was the one for men to tread.

They were in Venice now, and the gliding waters, the muffled sounds of gondolas darting hither and thither laden with secrets, fascinated her. She had never travelled before. And, without knowing it, travel brought an illumination of the mind which made her understand the mind of William Randolph.

An infinite patience, that was like the patience of old buildings, invaded her being. In time his mood would change—the mood of melancholy which came over him, and which was in keeping with the “Bridge of Sighs.”

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She remembered that Clifford Yelverton had told her that Arabia with its restfulness, yet brought the feeling that a surprise was in reserve, that mysterious happenings might take place. So, to-day, she told herself that truth, sincerity, were but pandering to poetry, to tradition; that the very sleepiness of Italy meant, that one in sleep, would utter prophecies—prophecies which would come true.

Sometimes she felt regret, not at having linked her life with his, but at having left her cottage, her occupation. There was a desultory feeling, more of ennui than of dullness. There could be no dullness in Venice, she told herself, but a feeling of unemployed flesh lying idle, of energies waiting for resurrection.

Work had become second nature to her, and Italy breathed, that nature needed no help.

The solidity, the crispness of England—she felt that she would be glad when system ruled her life again. Yet she was content to dream. Only she seemed to have grown a little apart from William Randolph. It seemed to her that the environment did not suit him and her; that both had sought sane, healthy pastures, and that Venice was neurotic, bringing something of the overpowering nausea of exotic flowers, too highly perfumed, needing space, distance.

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' Then presently, something more infinitesimal, yet forceful, as if her mind had focussed itself to a tiny nucleus which radiated vitality, made her begin to realise that she must appeal to him, to lay aside the gloom, which distressed her; that she must insist on hearing what he had to say, and on telling him in return who she was. It was no good for the humans to be mysterious. Mystery belonged to the dark ages, and they both belonged to new cycles. They had played at being primeval, at having been created in a Garden of Eden, and nothing but the usual would please, would chase away the confusion; reality was wanting, and she felt instinctively that unless truth crashed, this man, William Randolph, would become another Clifford Yelverton, would wander away from her. She wasn't going to let him do that.

She had quite made up her mind that dreamers were not happy; that the critical, the real, was necessary—discipline, system. The earth, the tides, the stars, are bound by a system. What would happen if they wandered? What happened to the wandering star, rushing across spaces? It fell to earth, ceased to exist. And she wanted William Randolph to continue to shine, and she had power to bind him. She was no longer the helpless child she had been, when she had

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married. She had a feeling that to get at him she would have to rush to the moon, the stars; to draw down the elements, and gather them in bundles; to trample on dreams—but she must reach him. He was wandering away, and this time she refused to be deserted.

And, one night when he was smoking on the balcony, she went to him and laid her cool hand on his shoulder.

"You are not happy, William," she told him. "There is something on your mind, and you've got to tell me. It doesn't matter what it is, I have got to know it."

She sat down on a seat near him and waited.

He laughed a scoffing, uncomfortable laugh.

"And, when I tell you, you'll hate me."

"Never," she said, "never! I wouldn't mind if——" she broke off.

"If what? if I committed a murder?"

"No, not even that," she glided beside him, and laid her head on his breast, and she laughed her gurgling, child-laugh, which had never deserted her, "as long as you did not kill me."

He stroked her head.

"What a wonderful woman you are."

She looked up at him in the moonlight.

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"Yet there was a man who thought me awful, once."

"He didn't know; the world is peopled with fools."

"And you are one." She laughed again. She was trying to make it easy for him, and something vital in her drew his mind together.

"Yet, if it changed your position, if——" He broke off.

"If I told you I had been brutal, hard, cruel, to a woman?"

She was silent.

"I don't believe it," she said; "she must have been a tiresome woman."

"She seemed tiresome to me, but—— Perhaps it was my fault."

"Of course it was your fault: there is no woman who cannot be managed. But you wouldn't take the trouble."

He laughed. how well they understood each other.

"No, I wouldn't take the trouble, it bothered me."

"Well, did she care for you?"

There was a catch in his breath as he answered her.

"Yes, that is what I hate about it. She is waiting for me. I wish she wouldn't."

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There was a moment's silence, and a thousand dreads seized Lucille.

"And you want to go back to her—is that it?"

Her voice was dry. It voiced the possibility of renunciation, an awful renunciation.

"No, I don't, but——"

"You think you ought to—she is unhappy?"

Once more the voice of failure entered her life. This man, too, was going away. The loneliness was going to return. Only this time how awful it was—the repetition, the reopening of the wound—how much more painful than the first incision.

Eleanor Brodrick's words returned to her: "Surely you ought to know something of this man before you marry him."

Yet, she told herself, she was glad she had not known the mystery of him: that had been a part of the charm, the fascination. She would not have been without this honeymoon for worlds, even if he left her. Now she had known love.

"Are you bound to her in any way?"

There was a great dread in her voice.

"She is my wife!"

There was a long silence, while she felt his hands grip her arms, lest she should go away from him.

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‘But she did not go at once. Then she stood up.

“You must go back to her, of course.”

There was no reproach in her voice. He felt, as she had felt, when she had been told that her husband lived. She had meant to deceive him, now he had deceived her. It was decreed that they should spend these weeks together. Each would go their own way; but the memory of the days, the evenings, at Sweetbriar Cottage—nothing could take those away. She was of the women who are only to have gleams of sunlight.

“I won’t go back to her,” he said fiercely; “I won’t.”

“Dear, you must.” She was playing with his fingers nervously. “You will be glad one day.”

She was thinking of her long waiting, and how she could have welcomed her husband a year ago.

“Oh, don’t ask me to. I want to stay with you.” The voice was that of a helpless child; then he went on pleading for himself. “I did my best, I stayed away for twelve years.”

“Twelve years!” She started.

“More, it is thirteen now. I don’t

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remember what she was like. If I met Her now I would not know her. She was a child, and she worried me: she didn't understand. I gave her all my money,* and I heard that she had married. I wanted her to be happy—I stayed away for twelve years. I wandered all over the world. I have seen the sun rise at every hour, I have seen it set in every part of the world. I tried to stay away, and I couldn't. Then I met you: you understood so well I couldn't let you go. I have given up a great deal for her," he went on, almost plaintively. Then fiercely he asked her. "Do you believe that a woman would still care after all those years?"

She strove to be sincere.

"Yes, I think so, if—if she had not met any other man whom she liked."

"I had hoped she would." He leaned his head on his hand now, looking dejected. "But the other day they sent me a cablegram. It had been round the world. She told me that she wanted me, that I must come home at once."

"And now you are beginning to feel that you ought to have answered it."

"Yes; I am wondering if that is what I ought to have done, but it is too late now.

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"I didn't want to go back, only I wanted you to know, to forgive."

"As if there could be a question of forgiveness between you and me." She spoke almost irritably. Then she added : " But, of course, you must go."

She stepped back into her bedroom and closed the window.

CHAPTER XXI

WHEN she closed the window—separated herself from William Randolph, with something irrevocable, final, in the act—she asked herself why it was that life dealt thus harshly with her. For the first time almost, revolt invaded her being. She had led a virtuous life, almost the life of a nun—a nun allowed to wander and meet temptation. She had been trusted with her own virtue by the gods, and she had not failed in the trust; yet to-day they failed to acknowledge her merits. A second time, life had flaunted happiness in her face, and run away and hidden it; yet this time she didn't complain. There seemed something natural in the breaking of the thread. He and she had played at being an adventurer, an adventuress; and they had no right to complain if they reaped adventure. This was an adventure.

At first, her position in the eyes of the world, of the law, did not appal her. Some-

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thing in his personality, in her confidence in him—a confidence which he inspired in the midst of vagueness—the certainty that he was a gentleman, giving something stable to his insincerity, had prevented that. It was after an hour or two, that her cheeks began to flame, and something within seemed to draw down to her feet. The sensation of shame was succeeding the feeling of wonder. She could hardly have said, what was the feeling which prompted her to shut herself up to-night. It was not the thought of the other woman: it was not the realisation that she was not his legal wife. Something reckless, wild, in her thoughts told her that one night—a hundred nights—more or less would make no difference. It was a great fear of the future, the dread lest something terrible should happen, which would proclaim her shame to the world; and she shuddered as she thought of the dreams of tenderness she had indulged in—dreams of maternity—which had been aroused, then checked again, then allowed to rise once more. It was the feeling of disappointment, which brought the first tear to her eyes. He must go back, of course, and he would be unhappy at leaving her. As for herself, she had not thought yet what she would do.

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She would have to move on again—a waif, a stray—and this time with a more intangible, unexplainable story which she could never tell to any one. It was strange how their positions, their *rôles*, were reversed—how he was going back to a devoted wife, to a home, to a personality. She—she had nowhere to go back to—could never claim her own name again. Traverty was dead, and the long waiting for him must turn into the longer, more indefinite, intolerable waiting for death.

Was it a punishment, she asked herself, because at the eleventh hour her fidelity had failed her, because at the eleventh hour her body, her mind, her very soul, had recoiled before the idea of Clifford Yelverton entering into her life again?

All night she paced the floor, wondering what the man would do. He wouldn't go back to his wife—she knew it—unless she urged him. Would she have the courage to do this? Would he ever forgive her for doing it? They two—how well they had understood each other! If only—if only she had the courage to be honestly wicked, to go away with him and scoff at the world, at conventionality. But she couldn't do it—she knew she could not do it. He had not

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been able to; he had tried, and failed. With all his eccentricity, with all his want of conventionality, with his vagueness, his strange creeds, his intolerance of hide-bound civilisation, he had not been able to do it—had not been able to forgive himself; then how could she, whose thoughts had been always pure and chaste, instinctively repudiating intrigue, the clandestine, inviting the sun to shine into the hidden corners of her heart, the while she threw a veil between herself and the world—a veil which had hidden her intensity, her constancy, her love.

And he, the man, wondered that confession, truth, did not bring great peace; instead, it brought the feeling of despair. She had said that he must go, and he told himself that in time he would obey her. He wondered what instinct moved her, whether of shame or disillusion, of jealousy or scorn, or simply the wish to do what was right.

How he missed her to-night! to-night of all nights he needed her arms around him. He could never, never be kind to that other woman. Formerly, his feelings towards her had only been those of indifference, interspersed with irritability; now, he hated her—the waiting woman.

And at dawn he wandered out far away in

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a gondola, as far as he could go, then out into the country beyond Venice; and she crept into his room, feeling grey and haggard as the morning, and wondered what he was thinking of, what he was going through, and faintly who he was, what was his name. Listlessly, as if it did not matter, yet it brought comfort, she fingered his things, set them in order. Then presently her fingers clutched a cable message amongst some old papers. They had fallen out of an old envelope which was beginning to give way, which was torn and greasy. She gathered them up. She had no curiosity. If she wanted to know who he was, he would tell her. She did not want to know now. He was going to disappear, like a nameless stranger she had met in some desert, and who had charmed her, but who had not even told her from what country he came. But as she put the papers together, back within the protection of the old envelope, and wound a string around them, her eyes fell on the name, the address, on the envelope. The handwriting—she knew it well. It was that of Greene & Hastings and the name, it was so familiar that for the moment she failed to realise how out of place it was in the drawer of William Randolph: "The Honble. Clifford Yelverton."

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Greene & Hastings had been in doubt as to how to address him. To address him as Lord Traverty was to disown the present heir, to disregard his refusal to claim his title. The outer envelope, on which they had pandered to his wish for secrecy, and inscribed the name he had adopted, William Randolph, had mislaid, or thrown away.

"Clifford Yelverton—Clifford Yelverton."

She sat on the bed, speechless, while joy seemed to reach her slowly, then to expand and envelop her, to make her very flesh tingle, as if with sprays of delicious water. Slowly the wonder turned to merriment, the merriment to laughter.

If he was Clifford Yelverton, then she—she was——

"Lucille, Lucille, Lucille!" She cried out the name as if it were that of some one else. Her head was turning with the strangeness of it.

"We are not those other people at all," she said to herself; "we have never been any one else, and he—he has come back."

Then she fell on the bed and laughed hysterically, till she burst into tears.

And she had thought that it was all wrong, that she had done something awful, that he

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had ; so he had, but then now it was all right, only how could he have gone through the marriage service? She would punish him for that, for running off with the other woman—the woman of his fancy. It seemed to her the most absurd thing, as if she had been her husband's mistress, and now was about to bring a divorce against herself.

Then, growing quieter, she wondered whether, when he knew, he would be disappointed—whether the fact that she was the old Lucille would scare him away ; but she didn't think so.

And the morning wore on without his returning, and she was dying with longing to tell him, to tease him, to throw herself in his arms, the while something within turned from fleeting pleasure to permeating joy. But the breakfast hour came and went, and still he did not return. An awful dread invaded her being, lest some accident had happened to him, now, in the hour of her triumph. She despatched messengers hither and thither, but to no purpose. If there had been an accident, they would have heard, they said. She could hardly stand the restlessness of her mood, her heart. Where had he gone? Then, as the day rolled on, a grave sweetness rested on her lips, and a deeper glance flashed from

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her eye. She knew where he had gone—gone back to the woman, gone to Greene & Hastings to find out her address. And they didn't know it. She laughed to herself. He deserved this. At one moment she started to write to them, then something of mischief, a demon of torment, rose within and held back her fingers. They would find her in time, trace her up, and she, after all these years she could afford to wait.

And two days later, she left Venice and returned to the little cottage in Kent, the cottage of Marie Prideaux, once Yelverton, then Randolph, then Dowager Lady Traverty, now the Lady Traverty, the only one.

"I shall end by not knowing who I am," she told Eleanor Brodrick. "I seem to have had a crowd of husbands, don't I? Doesn't it seem wonderful that it should have been the same man all the time?"

"What a waste that double marriage was."

Once more Eleanor Brodrick congratulated herself on her perspicuity.

"I just felt that it was he—certain of it. Do you know that now I begin to think, I thought so the first day you both met, the evening that you were too upset to play."

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And looking away dreamily, as she musingly pieced together a hundred things in her mind, Lucille murmured :

“And I am beginning to think that I knew it—knew it and didn’t believe, didn’t want to know.”

But as the days went by she began to grow restless and nervous. What if he had not gone back, not tried to find her? what if he had disappeared again? No; this time something told her that if he were not trying to find Lucille he was, at least, trying to get rid of her, to make way for the other woman, Marie Prideaux.

It was a shock when Clifford Yelverton walked into the office of Greene & Hastings and took a chair with something of an accustomed manner. He looked older, and his beard changed him, but even if he had not announced himself as he came in, they would have known him by his likeness to his father, by the way he sprawled in, then drew one long leg over the other after he had sat down.

They had never believed that he really was dead; enquiries had resulted in nothing. No one, in no part of South Africa, had heard of his even being there lately, and they knew that he had been in hiding as

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William Randolph, at the Hermitage, near Lichborough. In a fashion, as they shook hands with him, they realised the gravity of the situation—that something strange had happened, and that in all probability still stranger things were going to happen. They had always feared complications, and there was something of perturbed restraint which tempered the cordiality of their welcome. They knew that Mr Randolph had married, and wondered at his audacity, wondered how it was that the Miss Marie Prideaux mentioned in the paper had not more perspicuity. Who Miss Prideaux was, they did not know. It had never occurred to them that it might be Lucille. Now it had flashed across their brain that Miss Prideaux had discovered, and that there was going to be a row. They were almost glad; he deserved it, and all their sympathies were with the beautiful young wife who waited.

“I’ve come back, you see.” There was a moment’s awkward silence. Mr Greene, now an old man whose hands trembled, hid his disapproval with a laugh.

“Tired of your own company at last, eh? Going to settle down?” The two senior members wondered what form the settling

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down was going to take; what he had done with the woman, Marie Prideaux.

"I'm in the deuce of a mess."

"Really!" Incredulity seemed more respectful than acquiescence.

"We were always a little afraid," Mr Greene murmured.

"I'm going to claim the title and estates, and all that sort of thing, and I want to come to some arrangement with Mrs Yelverton."

"What kind of arrangement?"

It was the younger member of the firm who spoke now, one who had entered it since Yelverton's departure, but he knew the story. He considered that he was more competent to deal with it than the old man.

Yelverton gave him a scrutinising look, a look almost of disdain. This young fellow seemed something of an upstart.

"Why, Good Lord, man, the best I can."

"You wish for a reconciliation?"

The old man looked at him with a piercing glance. He was thinking of Marie Prideaux.

"No, no! not exactly; I should like to hear her views. As a matter of fact, Greene, I don't suppose we should ever get on, should we, after all these years and all that."

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"A separation?" murmured Mr Greene.

"A separation—that wouldn't enable either of us to marry again, would it?"

"No, certainly not, there would have to be a divorce."

"Oh, ah—yes, that's it; there would have to be a divorce." His thoughts flew to Lucille, to Marie. How would these two women figure if he began a divorce? The idea of a scandal worried him hugely, and he was dazed at the result of his small act of going away from Lucille.

"I should like you to see her, to ask her what she wishes, to tell her that I want to be free—to set her free. I suppose it can be managed?" He spoke tentatively, as if he were appealing to them to release him.

"It might be managed, I think. Of course, it has always seemed to me that she had a right to be free, but, the trouble is, Mr Yelverton, that we don't know where to find her. She has disappeared. We have often tried to communicate with her, and she has always evaded us."

"You must do your best. She must be found." He spoke insistingly. He was lonely, miserable, without Marie, ashamed for her, not for Lucille. He must put things straight for Marie's sake. Then, because he

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had nothing to do, because some instinct urged him, he left London and went to the Hermitage. His man, Morley, started when he saw him—wondered at his being alone.

"Are you going to have supper here, sir, or at the other house?"

"The other house?"

He looked at the man with vacant eyes.

"I thought, perhaps, sir, that as Mrs Randolph was over at Sweetbriar Cottage, you were going to——" The man broke off.

Over at Sweetbriar? He had never thought of that. He had left her at Venice, gone away ashamed to face her again, fearful of her reproaches, her sorrow. He had imagined that she would stay there till he wrote. He had meant to write to her to-night. It gave him a feeling of comfort to think that she was there. Whatever was going to happen in the future, he was going to see her again. What had made her come back to Sweetbriar? How was it that she was not ashamed? He spent an hour in wondering. Than he walked over, just as he had done for months. She might make a scene, but it was better to get the explanation over. He wanted her to know that he was going

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to do all he could to free himself, and he had a thirst, a craving to know what she thought. He wanted, too, to ask her if she knew where Lucille was. She had been her friend, perhaps she could help him. Yet it was with something of trepidation that he passed down his own hill, and entered by the garden gate. This time he did not leap the hedge. She knew that it was he, and had heard that he had returned; and she laughed to herself.

And to-night she was alone in the house; there was no Holo, no maid.

The old woman who kept the keys of the closed cottage had gone home. Just he and she, husband and wife, yet with a mystery between them which gave a touch of the illicit to the interview—the interview in the darkness beneath the copper beech trees.

She pressed her hands to her heart as she heard him coming up the gravel path, while she remembered Eleanor Brodrick's words: "It is the most improper thing I ever heard, the way you have gone to live with your husband."

Yes, it seemed improper; and the impropriety, how it delighted her!

He came and sat on the old seat beside her. He was ashamed, but he loved her so

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dearly. Would she ever forgive him? And over both there coursed the memory of those nights in Venice, those nights in which their minds had been eerie, as the goll grey of Venetian haze is eerie.

"I don't want to bother you," he said in a low tone. "I will go away directly, but I want you to know that I am doing all I can. I am going to try and get a divorce. I want to be free—free to love you."

She laughed a little rippling laugh.

"No, you mustn't do that," she said. "It would be so dreadful for her, for your wife." She laughed, and he thought her heartless. She did not pity him—she scorned him.

"Don't you want me to?"

"No, I would rather not." She laughed again.

"But think——"

"I have thought a great deal."

"I told them to find her, to see what could be done, but they don't know where she is."

This time she laughed uncontrollably, and he grew frightened. Grief, horror, shame, had made her mad.

"I thought that perhaps you could help me. You knew her once. I am Clifford Yelverton."

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There was a long pause.

"And you don't want to go back to her?"

"God forbid!" He spoke solemnly; but once more a peal of merry laughter burst from her lips.

"Oh, poor Lucille," she said.

"Oh, I know that I am a brute, but—you are so charming."

When he spoke like that his voice thrilled her.

"Oh, I think you will have to go back; you will see, you will have to go back. Unless, of course, she won't have you. She may care for some one else, don't you know?"

"That is my one hope."

A step sounded outside. It was the telegraph boy, and both went forward to meet him.

"Lady Traverty?" The boy held out his message.

"Yes."

She took the telegram and read it by the light that streamed out on to the lawn from the window.

Clifford stood by her, mystified.

"No answer."

The boy turned and went down the pathway, and mounted his bicycle at the gate.

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"It is from Greene & Hastings," she said, "and they have found her."

He looked at her, dazed, puzzled, unbelieving; then she leaned against him, and looked up into his face.

"You have come back," she said, "you have come back."

THE END

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